

Chapter 1

31.10.1981

The Dark Lord stared unbelievably at the little child who looked up at him with wide startled emerald eyes. The baby blinked and suddenly began to scream. The loud crying of the child finally jolted Voldemort out of his paralysis. If he hadn't blocked the rebounded spell in time he would very probably be dead by now. He couldn't believe it, when he noticed the lightning shaped scar on the child's forehead.

Up to now no one had ever survived the Killing Curse. The child of the Potters had to possess incredible magic powers. That was the only explanation which made the occurrence halfway understandable. While Voldemort was eying the screaming baby he pondered what he should do now. The best would be probably to try it again with another curse.

But should he really take the risk? Who could say what would happen then? Apart from that it would be a downright shame to waste such a power potential. He reached out with his arms and lifted the raven-haired baby, who promptly stopped crying, out of the cradle. The golden necklace which was flung around the child's little fist and was now falling silently back onto the soft blanket of the cradle, he didn't notice. The misshaped stone which hung on the necklace and which had shone still in a warm golden tone only a few moments ago was now jet-black and seemed to glow.

As his senses slowly returned to him again, the Dark Lord also remembered the name of the child. He turned his head slightly and looked down at the lifeless woman whose dark red hair was gleaming in the dim light of the magic candles and who recently had implored him to spare the life of Harry.

"Mum."

Harry wriggled in his arms and reached with his tiny hands for his dead mother. Voldemort hugged the struggling child to himself and in this moment he made his decision. He would raise the Potter child as his own and later on he would use the child's power for his own purposes. Such a magical talent wasn't allowed to be wiped out. Not

to forget was as well that Harry had survived his curse. As long as he didn't know the exact reason for this phenomenon, it would be better to do nothing first. He would see how the course of events would develop.

The Dark Lord apparated to the garden of the house and took his wand in his hand. With a faintly murmured word Godric's Hollow was destroyed by an enormous explosion. Harry, startled by the loud bang and worried that his mother hadn't taken him in her arms, started yet again to cry. But Voldemort didn't pay any attention to it. Seconds later the Dark Lord arrived at his estate, Arreton Castle, where he was greeted by a terrified looking house-elf.

"You will watch over Harry and take care of the child. You are responsible that nothing happens to him," Voldemort ordered and handed the child to the house-elf.

Nell bowed, took the baby cautiously in her arms and disappeared. The Dark Lord turned around and began to walk through the empty halls. Finally the Potters were dead. James and Lily Potter had both been very powerful and had ruined his plans more than once. He had often enough tried to kill them but it had always failed. Now, however, with, he reluctantly admitted, the help of an insignificant creature it had been accomplished. The Potters would never again get in his way. Furthermore they had been very close to Dumbledore. Voldemort twisted his thin lips to a satisfied, gloating smile. The death of the Potters would be a terrible blow for the headmaster of Hogwarts. It was really too bad that he wouldn't be able to see Albus' face when he would hear the news, he thought regrettably.

His thoughts wandered back to the Potter's child who he had taken with him. He still couldn't believe that this baby had actually managed to survive *his* Killing Curse and on top of that had nearly killed him as well. At the next best opportunity he would rummage through his library. Perhaps he would find something in his old books which would supply him with a hint why Harry Potter had survived his curse. For the time being however he banished this extraordinary event which was hardly to grasp out of his thoughts. He nodded slightly. Today had been indeed very successful for him.

Sirius Black fell to his knees while staring horrified at the sight of the destroyed house. Tears began to stream over his lean face as he realized what had happened. A wave of grief submerged him. But then he was seized with such a hate he had never felt before. James, who had been closer to him than a brother; Lily, the most beautiful and kindest woman, who had been like a sister to him and his little godson Harry, they all were dead. He would never see them again. Nevermore would he see James' hazel mischievous eyes, never again would he hear Lily's silvery laugh and never again would he hold Harry in his arms. The worst and most unbearable thing for him was however that everything was his fault.

Why for god's sake had he persuaded James to switch the secret keeper? The hate he felt for the betrayer nearly swept him away while the feeling of guilt weighed heavily on his soul. He knew that he wouldn't be able to forgive himself to the end of his life that he had not become the secret keeper of his best friends and his little godson. From nowhere, suddenly, many more wizards and witches appeared next to him and stared with horror at the destructed place.

"No, why them of all people?" Remus Lupin mourned and while his face contorted with sorrow he had to think how happy they had been only a few days ago. As his gaze fell on Sirius who kneeled on the ground he froze. Sirius had been the secret keeper. Had he betrayed James, Lily and Harry? The thought was terrible but how else the Death Eaters should have succeeded in finding Godric's Hollow? Remus turned around and looked to Minerva McGonagall. His former teacher had put her hands in front of her face and was crying. Next to her Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts and leader of the Order of the Phoenix was standing. His eyes had lost their usual twinkle and glowing and silent tears were streaming down his ancient face.

His gaze was riveted on the Dark Mark which was hovering above them in the sky. Neither of them seemed to notice Sirius' presence. Remus stepped forward, laid one hand on Sirius' shoulder and asked,

"Have you betrayed them?"

Chapter 2

2.11.1981

It was icy at the graveyard. The snow flakes and the strong wind caused Sirius Black to shiver but he didn't sense the coldness. Since Halloween it seemed that he was only able to feel hate and desperation while the picture of the destroyed Godric's Hollow was constantly hovering before his eyes. He turned his head and let his gaze wander over the crowd. He was surprised that so many people had come to the funeral. But actually he shouldn't be.

The Potters had been respected highly and had been loved by many. They had fought with a bravery against Voldemort which not many possessed. They had been one of the old wizard families and now they had been killed. James' and Lily's bodies had been found in the ruins of Godric's Hollow but not Harry's. The young man closed pained his eyes as he imagined how the ruins of the house had buried Harry underneath and again he sensed how the feeling of guilt weighed him down.

Why hadn't he seen that the traitor was Peter? In the last two days he had asked himself this question countless times but he hadn't been able to find an answer. Even now he couldn't believe that he had been so completely wrong about his former friend. But also the query after the reason of Peter Pettigrew's betrayal was gnawing at him all the time. He was unable to understand it. Why had Peter handed his best friends over to Voldemort? How on earth could he have done that?

Sirius gazed up in the grey dark sky if there he would find an answer and remembered how difficult it had been to convince Dumbledore and the others that he hadn't been the secret keeper but Peter. Only his pleas to testify under Veritaserum had saved him from Askaban and finally they had believed him. Sirius shuddered at the thought what would have happened if they hadn't done it; although he actually deserved it. If he hadn't persuaded James to take Peter but instead had become himself the secret keeper as James had wanted this from the beginning, then his best friend, Lily and his little godson

would be still alive. Sirius gave a loud sob and while the pain overwhelmed him, he began bitterly to cry.

Remus Lupin who was standing a few metres next Sirius was mourning as well. Silent tears were streaming down his haggard, careworn face. James, Lily and Harry had been his family. The only one he had ever known. His friends had accepted him and never had they treated him with contempt and disdain, not like all the others had done it as soon as they discovered that he was a were-wolf. Without James' connections to the Minister of Magic it would have never been possible for him to become an Auror. They had helped him and supported him, wherever they could. But, as they had needed help, he hadn't been there for them.

He hadn't been able to prevent the attack on them. They all were dead and Harry, he had been only one year old. Was that justice? Remus felt such a pain that he could have immediately killed Peter without wasting a thought. Peter however had vanished without a trace since Halloween. Since then no one had seen him. Probably he had run straight to Voldemort to hide from them, Remus thought cynically. Peter. He shook slightly his head.

He had never thought that Peter was a traitor. Yet it was really so obvious. Peter had been the weakest of them, who had possessed the least bravery; always had it been James, Sirius or he himself who had had to help Peter if he had run into trouble, but never had Peter helped one of them. Not, when there had been really any inconveniences. But only now, by hindsight, he realized that.

Turning his head he saw Sirius and for one moment he was filled with anger. Why had he persuaded James to take Peter? Why hadn't he asked him if he hadn't wanted to be the secret-keeper himself? Had Sirius not trusted him? Then his fury disappeared however when noticing Sirius' desperate face. His friend couldn't have known it. No more than it had ever occurred to him that Peter was a spy of Voldemort. He shook unbelievably his head. How could they all have been so blind? His anger and hate were directed instead on Peter and on this day the were-wolf swore to avenge the Potters and to let Peter pay for his deed.

No one of all those present, who had come to mourn together, noticed the rat which was sitting hidden behind a tree and staring at the graveyard. Peter's eyes wandered over the many people and said over and over again to himself that he had had to do it that he hadn't had the tiniest choice as the Dark Lord had demanded from him to give away the whereabouts of the Potters. He would have been killed if he had refused. It hadn't been his fault. But why was he feeling so miserably then? He hadn't had a choice and he wouldn't think about this anymore. There was no point to it anyway. It was over. James, Lily and Harry were dead. The rat spun around and run as fast as it was able to away while the foliage was rustling softly as the animal was rushing through the withered leaves.

Hours later, as a snow storm was howling around the castle of the Dark Lord, a little child was lying in one of the many rooms in a cradle, wrapped firmly in his warm blankets and had a nightmare. Harry saw a flash of blinding green light racing towards him and heard a cruel cold laugh. Startled the baby tore open his emerald eyes and began to scream. The impenetrable darkness which surrounded him scared him and he called for his mum whom he hadn't seen for so long.

He waited however vainly. His mother didn't come. Instead Nell appeared and tried to soothe him. The little house-elf picked the raven-haired baby up and hugged him cautiously to her while rocking him slightly and murmuring soothing words. In the short time, since she took care of Harry, she had grown fond of the child. She found him so sweet and she pitied him. Although she didn't know what had happened she had realized that it couldn't have been something good. Harry clung to her and looked with his tearstained tiny face up to her.

"Mummy, Mummy!"

Nell only sighed sadly as Harry was asking again after his mother. It tore her to see her little charge so unhappy but she couldn't fulfil his wish. She laid the child back in the cradle and wiped gently his tears off his cheeks. Since the Dark Lord had brought Harry to her, he hadn't visited once over which Nell was only relieved. She feared her master.

Nell covered Harry and sat down on the brink of the bed. As she looked at the child, who had nearly ceased his crying by now and who slowly couldn't keep his eyes open anymore, there she knew that she would protect her little darling against all threats which might occur in the future.

Chapter 3

31.10.1983

Voldemort regarded the child who slept peacefully in his little bed. It wouldn't take long anymore until Harry would be able to learn magic. So he would soon have to choose a teacher. The best decision would be a Death Eater whom he trusted most since at the moment nobody was aware of Harry's existence, apart from the house-elf who was taking care of the child.

The Dark Lord wanted however to hide Harry from the world, until the right time had come. Only then the world should hear about the heir of Voldemort. Harry turned aside and Voldemort began once again to ask himself how the child could have survived his curse. Although he had consulted all the books which he could have found in his library, no one had been of any use for him. The fact remained that no wizard had ever survived the Killing Curse.

It was actually impossible and yet Harry had done the impossible. The Dark Lord cast a last glance at Harry, went past the trembling house-elf whose eyes had observed every step of him, left the room and walked back to his study while he went through his followers in his mind's eyes and pondered who would be suitable the most for teaching his heir magic. He didn't need to rush anything. He would still have time for a while after all.

Arriving in his study he set down and called a house-elf to him.

"Have Lucius, Severus and the others already returned?" he asked.

As the house-elf said no he leant back in his arm-chair, looked into the dancing flames of the fire and began to plan his next move in this war.

Severus Snape stifled a curse. Unfortunately he hadn't had the opportunity anymore to warn the Order of the Phoenix about the planned attack against the Lennox family. The wizard family fought against the Dark Lord and Mr. and Mrs. Lennox were in the Order and moreover high-ranking employees of the Ministry, so that it

wasn't surprising that Voldemort had sent them here with the order to kill them.

And now he couldn't do anything to prevent the murders. Tensed Severus waited until Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy plus Bellatrix Lestrange had destroyed the wards which surrounded the house of the Lennox so far that they could sneak unhindered into the garden. A little while later the Death Eaters quietly entered the house and went upstairs. Severus separated from the others and checked the rooms on the right side. When pushing open the door of the last room he saw a woman sleeping on the bed. Because the moonlight fell on her face he immediately recognized her.

It was the daughter of the Lennox'. In Hogwarts he had been two years above her. He stared at her and he didn't know exactly why he did it but he put a sleeping charm on her, picked the motionless figure up and hid the young woman under the bed. Then he placed an invisible charm on her. In that moment terrible screams echoed through the house and Severus flinched. After making the bed with trembling fingers, he hurried to the others. His heart raced and he felt ice- cold. If the other Death Eaters or Voldemort would ever find out what he had done he didn't want to know which consequences his high-handedness would entail. When finding his companions he saw Mr. and Mrs. Lennox and their only son lying dead on the floor. Lucius Malfoy looked shortly at every one of them and ordered in a cold voice,

"Search the house if we have overlooked someone."

Severus followed Lucius out of the room, paused and waited with thumping heart. Seeing how Bella came out of Alison Lennox' room he felt how relief spread in him. No one had noticed anything. As soon as the Death Eaters had established that no other person was in the house anymore, they left. They had hardly reached the garden when Lucius took his wand and cast the Dark Mark in the sky. Lucius glanced at him:

"Are you coming with us?" he asked coolly.

Severus shook his head and replied,

“No, I’ve to return to Hogwarts.”

The silver blond man nodded and gave the others the signal to leave. One moment later they apparated and Severus stayed behind alone. He sighed relieved, glad that he hadn’t needed to kill this time. A noise caused him to whirl around. Sirius Black and Remus Lupin stood in front of him. He hated them just the same as he had hated Potter.

But Potter had managed to get himself killed. If it hadn’t been for Lily, Severus hadn’t mourned at all two years ago. Lily had been a friend however who had trusted and believed him that he wasn’t on Voldemort’s side. Although he worked as a spy for Albus Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix, many members still distrusted him and to those Black and Lupin belonged. Potter had also seen always a supporter of the Dark Lord in him.

He remembered the night two years ago and the sight which had greeted him, having arrived there. Why had Godric’s Hollow been destroyed so much? Such a thing had never happen before. The Death Eaters didn’t destroy the houses of their victims. So why had the Dark Lord ordered to destroy the house of the Potters then? “Couldn’t you have warned us? Or have you switched to the Dark Side?”

Sirius Black’s sharp voice cut through Severus’ thoughts. But before he had any opportunity to reply something, the rest of the Order appeared. Albus Dumbledore looked at him and asked calmly,

“What has happened?”

“They are dead, apart from the daughter. I’ve hid her under the bed,” Severus answered tiredly.

The headmaster of Hogwarts nodded and sighed.

”At least one survived.”

One hour later they arrived at Hogwarts and Alison Lennox was brought to the hospital wing, where Madam Pomfrey took care of her.

To discover that her family had been killed had been a terrible shock for her.

Seeing the pain in the sea-blue eyes of the young woman, Severus felt guilty. But he couldn't have prevented it, he said to himself. He had done everything what had been within his power. Turning around he wanted to leave the hospital wing as a soft voice called him back. She looked at him.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Severus looked at Alison for a moment and nodded shortly. Unable to say something he fled out of the room while his thoughts strangely lingered still on Alison. As he went through the Great Hall on his way to his chambers, he didn't even notice that he was passing Sirius Black and Remus Lupin who were sitting at one of the tables.

Sirius gazed after Severus who hurried out of the hall and asked himself what use the spy actually had for the Order if Snape didn't even manage to warn them before someone of them was killed. Had Snape been only able to warn them then that James and Lily would be Voldemort's next victims, had he himself only realized that Peter was a supporter of the Dark Lord and hadn't he only persuaded James to entrust Peter with the safety of his family, then his friends and Harry would be still alive today. But what was the use of all his anger, his pain and his feelings of guilt which weighed him down?

It had happened and no one of them could change the past, how much it might hurt him. He missed them so much and although two years had passed since this fatal night his sorrow hadn't decreased. Sirius raised his head and looked at Remus who sat opposite of him. Their gazes met and in Remus' eyes grief was mirrored as well. Sirius wondered if Remus had forgiven him meanwhile that his decision had led to the death of their friends in the end. Suddenly he remembered the day on which he had seen James, Lily and Harry for the last time and the sorrow threatened to overwhelm him. Abruptly he stood up and seeing Remus' questioning eyes, he said with a quivering voice,

"I'll go for a walk for a while."

As soon as he had left the castle, he paused for a moment and deeply inhaled the cold, icy air. While sauntering slowly over the grounds of Hogwarts, he decided to apparate to the graveyard. He wanted to be alone. He glanced over at the Forbidden Forest and involuntarily clenched his fists. Thinking how often James, Remus, Peter and he himself had sneaked in their Animagus figures into the forest; four friends who had sworn everlasting friendship to each other. Gazing up into the star-strewn sky he wondered once more why Peter had betrayed them and had become a supporter of Voldemort. Would he ever find an answer to his question?

At the same time in London a big dark brown rat tried to find a way into the Ministry of Magic. Since the Dark Lord was planning to conquer the building, he should get knowledge about the exact ground plan of the Ministry. Peter sighed while trying to remember where the entrance was, he had used the last time he had sneaked into the Ministry to gather information.

In the last two years he hadn't managed to become a Death Eater in the Inner Circle. He hadn't been very valuable to the Dark Lord since that Halloween. But he had had such a bad luck. Why for god's sake they had believed Sirius that they had switched secret-keeper? If they hadn't Sirius would be in Askaban and he would be still in the Order and it wouldn't be necessary to hide.

Sometimes he asked himself, if it had been worth it, to betray the people who had trusted him, for becoming a servant to the Dark Lord. But he hadn't had a choice he persistently assured himself, as he finally found the right pipe that would bring him straight into the Ministry.

Chapter 4

August 1984

The tall, black-haired woman who was hurrying briskly along the corridor wondered what the Dark Lord might want from her. It was unusual that he ordered only one Death Eater to him. Normally the whole Inner Circle was called. Had she unknowingly attract his anger? Well, she certainly would discover it very soon. Bellatrix Lestrange knocked at the door and stepped in. She bowed in front of her master and waited. Lord Voldemort stared piercingly at her with his red eyes and while stroking absent-mindedly his snake who had made herself comfortable in his lap, he asked,

"You have a daughter, haven't you?"

Surprised she answered,

"Yes, my Lord."

"Excellent. Listen Bella, I will give you a very important task. You will however maintain strict silence about it. If you tell anyone, you will be punished. I have chosen you to teach my son and heir reading, writing and of course magic."

Bella blinked, totally taken by surprise. *A son and heir?* She nodded weakly.

"I'm honoured my Lord. May I hear his name and age?" she asked as soon she could be sure that her tongue would obey her again.

"His name is Harry Riddle. You will however address him with my Lord. He is four years old."

"Four? But my Lord, he is too young to learn magic. He won't be able to perform the spells."

She had hardly finished however; there she knew that it would have been better to keep her opinion to herself.

Her master raised his wand and said coldly,

“Crucio.”

After he had lifted the curse, he rose from his armchair.

“Never question my decisions again. Come.”

As he had said this, he left the room. Bella stood up shakily and followed him. In her head a lot of questions spun round. She knew that it wouldn't be very intelligent to ask them but nevertheless she was desperately interested to know some things. Why the Dark Lord insisted so much upon secrecy? And who was the mother of this child? She was so lost in her thoughts that she almost hadn't noticed that her master had stopped in front of a door. The Dark Lord raised his wand and began to mutter quietly.

Shortly afterwards the door glowed in a red light and opened. In that moment they entered, the little child who was sitting on the floor and playing with a house-elf in the middle of the room lifted his head and stared at them, round-eyed and surprised.

Bella regarded him curiously. He had raven hair and the brightest emerald eyes, she had ever seen. Never before had she seen similar eyes. On his forehead he had a strange scar, shaped like a lightning. The boy stood up, stepped forward and stopped then.

Harry gazed at the woman and wondered who she might be. The man with the red eyes he had already seen once. He had come sometimes to his room and stared at him but he had never spoken to him. Harry was a bit afraid of him. He didn't like his red eyes which looked so scary. Nell had told him that he was the Dark Lord. She feared him as well.

Now he spoke,

“Harry, this woman will be your teacher. She will teach you everything you have to know for the time being.”

Looking at Bella, he added,

“Don't disappoint me.”

One moment later he had left the chamber. Harry who was still surprised that the man had said something to him felt slightly uncomfortable. He wasn't used to be in other company than in Nell's and he didn't like it that this strange woman was starring at him so oddly. When she finally averted her gaze, he felt relieved. Instead she looked now at Nell and ordered coolly,

"Elf, bring parchment and quills."

Nell nodded and disappeared while Harry found himself being again stared at by Bella's steel grey eyes.

"So, my Lord, please sit down. First I will teach you how to read and write," she said with a friendly sounding voice. Harry went to the table and asked himself whether it would make fun to learn something and whether Nell could perhaps learn it also.

Alison Lennox sauntered slowly over the grounds of Hogwarts. Her face she had turned to the warming sun.

Watching two butterflies which were dancing through the air, she felt happy. How beautiful this day was! Alison stretched out her hands and began to spin round in circles. Laughing she whirled around. A cloud moved in front of the sun, the glaring brightness faded and Alison stopped abruptly in her tracks. Her laugh died away, the sparkling shine in her eyes disappeared. What right had she to be happy while her family wasn't alive anymore?

How much she missed her parents and her brother, she couldn't express. It hurt her still to remember them but knowing that she fought against Voldemort comforted her.

As Albus Dumbledore had asked her last year if she didn't want to join the Order of the Phoenix she hadn't needed much time to think it over. It had been naturally for her. Even if it was dangerous, in her opinion it was her duty to fight against the Dark Side. The first time had been terrible. Pinning away with grief she had seen the only sense of her life in working for the Order. Only gradually her thoughts

had turned towards other things. And then there had been Severus; the man who had saved her life.

At the beginning she hadn't liked him very much. But one night she had seen him returning from a Death Eater meeting, still trembling from a Cruciatus- Curse. He had refused to go to the hospital wing and so she had brought him to his chambers. Only in that moment she had become aware of the fact that he was risking his life every time he was leaving Hogwarts and Voldemort was calling him. Any time his secret could be discovered and he could be exposed as a spy.

Slowly they had become friends. It hadn't been easy since his behaviour towards her had been rather unfriendly and sometimes even angry. She hadn't understood it. Disappointed and confused she had often been tempted to wish him at the devil and to speak to him never again.

She didn't know why but she had never done it. Perhaps she had sensed how lonely and unhappy he was. Then the day had come where she had been injured slightly in a smaller fight and as she had felt Severus' gaze on her and had looked at him, she had realized from one minute to the next that he loved her and that she loved him too. She had often felt guilty to be as happy as she was now at the moment. 'But wouldn't my parents and my brother have wanted me to be happy?' she thought and stared at the sun which was still covered by clouds. Alison sighed. Now she understood that he hadn't wanted to become close to another person. He hadn't wanted to make himself vulnerable. She didn't know as well whether she would be able to bear it again to lose a person she loved. But who knew how the future would look like?

She knew that he would never ask her to marry him. He wouldn't want to endanger her. In that case however / could ask him, Alison thought and suddenly began to smile high-spirited.

Albus Dumbledore sat behind his desk and looked through one of the arch-shaped windows up into the overcast sky. Strong wind had sprung up and was forming the clouds constantly into new shapes

which were quickly drifting past. Tiredly he heaved a deep sigh. He felt defeated and hopeless. The present situation was more than alarming. Three months ago Voldemort had conquered the Ministry of Magic so that not only the Minister of Magic had fled to Hogwarts but also many wizard families had either taken refuge in Hogwarts or had gone into hiding.

The Order of the Phoenix had been so much sought-after that Albus had had no choice but to reach the decisions which had to be made with his most closed confidantes and to inform the rest of the members later. But this was the only way to lead the Order efficiently. Despite all the people who fought against Voldemort they hadn't succeeded so far to deal the Dark Side a crushing blow and now Tom Riddle concentrated upon conquering Europe and to subject it.

The news of attacks on the mainland was increasing. According to his information there as well more and more resistance groups were forming. It would be wise to unite with them, Albus thought. It wouldn't be of any great use to have many far scattered resistance groups after all. It would be much better to join forces. He would think about this more thoroughly. Lost in thoughts the old wizard took his wand in his hand and touched with it the surface of his Pensieve. He whirled the silver- white substance around and paused then. A beautiful woman emerged from the Pensieve. It was Lily Potter. He sighed deeply as his grief threatened to overwhelm him. Lily, he thought and tears burned in his eyes. Since the time she and James had graduated and began to work in the Order, they had been very close to him.

Both remarkable powerful wizards had they above all helped him to develop strategies, had they come to him with new ideas and had shared with him the burden of leading the Order. In time he had begun to love them as if they would be his own children. Lily had been always optimistic. Constantly she had encouraged them. Even as the terrible news had increased day after day she hadn't lost hope. Albus remembered how happy the young couple had been as Harry had been born. How Lily had been radiant with joy as she had handed the baby to him for the first time, how proud James had been of his son.

Suddenly he thought back to Harry's first birthday, where the child had got the largest cake every guest had ever seen. The whole Order had been invited. Albus smiled. How furious Lily had been, when she had discovered that Sirius had given Harry a mini broom and that he and James had immediately tried to teach the baby flying. He sadly sighed. How happy these memories were, so were they most painful as well. Looking at Lily, he said quietly,

"I hope you're right that Tom will be defeated one day. If not I don't want to know what will happen to the world. But you're right, we must never lose hope."

Chapter 5

October 1984

The little raven haired boy gazed totally amazed at the many shops in Diagon Alley. It was the first time that Harry had left Arreton Castle. Never before had he seen so many people in one place, although in reality it were only few and had never seen so many different kinds of strange things.

The anxiety, which he had felt a while ago when Bella had put a spell on him and herself which had altered their appearances and when he had realized that Nell wasn't allowed to accompany them, had vanished. Excited he tried to register everything what extended itself before his eyes. Spotting a shop window in which brooms were showed he wanted to stop but Bella, who held Harry's hand firmly in hers, dragged him along. Harry stumbled alongside her and asked,

"Can I look at the brooms?"

"Not today, Harry," the coolly voice of the Dark Lord rang out who had necessarily charmed himself invisible.

Under no circumstances he did want to provoke an attack from the Order when being only in the company of Harry and Bella.

Hearing his voice, Harry, who had completely forgotten the presence of his father, flinched. Meanwhile Harry had understood that the man with the red eyes, which he still found creepy, was his father; a realization over which he had been very surprised. Sadly Harry cast a last glance over his shoulder back to the broom shop.

What a pity that he couldn't take a look at the shop. His sadness lasted however only for a short time since he remembered again that he should get his wand today. In the last three months Bella had taught him reading, writing and a bit of maths. He liked reading the most and could do it already very well. His teacher was strict and not very patient. So he wasn't sure if he liked her. Harry didn't understand that Bella knew extremely well she would be punished if he wouldn't make any progress.

'If magic is as well so interesting?' Harry wondered and began to look forward to get his wand. Shortly afterwards they finally reached the wand shop and entered it. It took a moment until Harry's eyes had gotten used to the darkness and he could made out the many shelves which were full to the brim with oval slim boxes. An old man shuffled towards them. The look out of his bright eyes was sharp and Harry moved closer to Bella who said in a gruff tone,

"The boy needs a wand."

She laid a hand on his shoulder and pushed him to the front. The man raised one eyebrow.

"But he is very young. I'm not sure if a wand will choose him," he objected.

Bella pointed her wand at Ollivander.

"Stop talking and show him wands," she ordered.

The eyes of Mr. Ollivander narrowed. Finally he nodded reluctantly, gave Harry a wand and told him to swing it through the air. Harry took the wand and did as he was told but nothing happened. Mr. Ollivander gave Harry wand after wand and Harry tried and tried. Then, while Ollivander was currently searching for more suitable wands, which his customer hadn't tried yet, Harry looked round the small shop. His eyes fell on a black wand which was lying on white satin in a small insignificant box.

The wand had a slight shimmer and Harry had the weird feeling that the wand was calling him. He stepped towards the little table, reached out with his hand and took it out of its box. All of a sudden he felt strange warmth in his fingers and golden sparks shot out of the wand. Happily Harry turned around and saw how Mr. Ollivander who in the meantime had appeared again and was holding several boxes in his arms, stopped abruptly in his track, stared piercingly at him and turned as white as a sheet.

"That can't be. That is impossible. That wand ...how curious," he stammered.

"What is so curious?" Voldemort asked who had become suddenly visible. Ollivander flinched back.

"Nothing, nothing important."

"Crucio"

The old wizard fell screaming to the floor. For a moment Harry stood completely petrified.

"Stop it, please stop it, father!"

Voldemort lifted the curse and asked again. With a voice full of hatred, Ollivander spoke,

"The wand possesses a feather of the same phoenix as yours."

The eyes of the Dark Lord widened. So he had been right with his presumption. The Potter child would be indeed extremely powerful one day if such a wand had chosen him at the age of four. Regarding the old man, he knew that it would be wise to kill him; before he could run to Dumbledore and tell him that a young boy in the Dark Lord's company had been chosen by a greatly powerful wand. Who could know to what conclusions that old fool would come? For a moment he considered to impose a memory charm on him but then decided against it. This charm could be broken after all. He rather wouldn't want to take this risk.

"Avada Kedavra," he said with a loud voice. Ollivander fell lifeless to the ground.

Voldemort turned, laid a finger under Harry's chin and forced the child to look at him.

"He was worthless. The most important thing in the world is, to have power, my son. Those who are strong enough to seek it will rule the world. Soon you will learn this. Come."

He let go off Harry and put the invisible charm on himself. Bella, who was still very much astounded about the wand, which had chosen the son of her master, grabbed Harry's hand. They left the shop and

Voldemort cast the Dark Mark in the sky. Then they apparated back to Arreton Castle. Arriving at the Castle Bella brought the child back to his rooms and left him there, without noticing, what a shock the events had been for the child. Harry, who was trembling madly, dropped to the floor. That green light he had seen before, in his nightmares. But he didn't understand exactly what just had happened. As Nell saw him, she clapped her hands in front of her face,

"Young master, what has happened to you?" she shrieked.

Harry tried to speak; no word could be heard however. Nell saw his tremor and white face and took him immediately to bed. Then she brought him a glass of hot cocoa and helped him to drink it. Quietly she began to sing. It took a long time until Harry stopped to tremble and fall asleep. Nell sat the whole night at his bed and watched over him. She would punish herself tomorrow. If it hadn't disturbed her young master she would do it now. She had failed him. She hadn't been there to protect him, from whatever had happened. She was a bad house-elf.

Meanwhile some members of the Order of the Phoenix were standing in Ollivanders shop and Alastor Moody was staring down at the lifeless body. Why had the Death Eaters so suddenly killed him? Although it had been quite known that Ollivander was against Voldemort and his supporters, it didn't make any sense, after letting Ollivander alive for so long.

Chapter 6

Sirius Black cursed while asking himself, where on earth they currently were. Albus had given Remus and himself the task to contact a French resistance group which had recently achieved several considerably victories in the fight against the Death Eaters. They had been wandering through this forest for ages now and had still not the slightest idea which direction they should take. Though Albus had told them the approximately whereabouts of the resistance group, after his explanations however they had to see a lake but far and away no lake was within view. Remus, who was gazing concentrated on his map, lifted shortly his head, looked around and said,

“We’re wrong, Sirius. Here ought to be...”

“....a lake. I know. Unfortunately it isn’t however. Shall we go back again?”

Remus shook undecided his head and suggested to have a short break. Sirius agreed and sat down on the ground, next to Remus who had spread out the map and was pointing thoughtfully to a spot.

“I think we have to be about here. I would say we should take the right path. Then we should actually find this lake of which Albus spoke and their headquarters are located nearby the lake.

So we only have to find this lake,” Remus said.

“Yes. But the question is where? We are searching already for hours and here everything is looking the same. Perhaps we’ve been here already once and have run in circles the whole time,” Sirius replied edgily.

“What’s wrong?” he asked a moment later, seeing that Remus was looking around with an alert expression on his face.

“I’ve heard a rustling,” his friend whispered back. Sirius gripped his wand more firmly and listened now as well.

“Probably it was only some animal,” he said finally, standing up.

“Hopefully,” Remus replied, folded the map up and rose as well.

“All right then, let’s try the right way.”

“Drop your wands!” a loud voice in French rang out.

Sirius and Remus slowly turned around. Quickly about a dozen wizards came out between the trees, the wands pointed at Sirius and Remus, they surrounded them.

“Who are you?” a different voice demanded to know.

“And who are you?” Sirius asked back, scrutinized the so suddenly appeared people and came to the conclusion that they couldn’t be Death Eaters. Nevertheless Sirius wasn’t willing to give away their identity first. A short moment they stood there and stared at each other. Finally one of the wizards took a step forward and said tersely: “We’re fighting against the Dark Lord.”

Sirius nodded briefly. His assumption that they were facing the French resistance group at last was confirmed and so he explained:

“We’re coming from Great Britain. We’re members of the Order of the Phoenix. Albus Dumbledore has sent us.”

The leader of the French inclined his head.

“Then come. We’ll check it.”

While it was indicated to them to follow, one of the men picked up their wands from the ground. Sirius felt lost without his wand but knowing that he wouldn’t get it back for the time being he sighed. As they, following the right path, passed a big lake shortly afterwards Sirius and Remus exchanged a look.

They reached the well hidden cache of the French resistance group and after a while they found themselves – without their wands – in a large tent. But they didn’t need to wait long until two women entered. Both were slender and had dark brown hair. They looked alike. One of them had blue eyes however while the other had grey eyes. The

blue-eyed woman had a small vial in her hand. She held it out to them and said in a clear voice,

“Veritaserum. We’ve to make sure that you aren’t Death Eaters.”

With a resignedly expression on his face Sirius seized the fragile vial, took a sip of the colourless, tasteless liquid and handed the Veritaserum on to Remus.

After it had been ascertained that they had spoken the truth the young woman said,

“I’m Charlotte Lynley and this is my sister Emily. Our uncle is the leader of our group. Currently he isn’t here however. We’ve actually expected you much earlier and when you didn’t get here to the arranged time we thought you wouldn’t come any more today. But our uncle should return soon. Then you’ll be able to speak with him.”

“That would be great. We couldn’t find the lake by the way, that’s why our lateness. Sorry, that we couldn’t come on time. I’m Sirius Black and this is Remus Lupin. I’m pleased to meet you,” Sirius replied and shook hands with Charlotte. For some obscure reason he held Charlotte’s hand a while longer as it would’ve been necessary. After he had greeted Emily as well Sirius turned again to Charlotte and asked curiously,

“Are you from Great Britain?”

Charlotte nodded; her dark blue eyes shimmered sadly.

“Yes, we were born there but when our parents were murdered we came to France to live with our aunt and her husband.”

While Sirius was talking with Charlotte, Remus’ eyes rested on Emily, who had been standing silently beside her sister so far. Remus stepped to the only table which was in the tent and was making a rather wobbly impression and put the vial with the Veritaserum which he still was holding in his hand down. He was now standing close to Emily and when she looked up, their eyes met. Instantly Remus supported himself heavily on the table and sharply drew a breath. He had sensed that Emily was a were-wolf as well. The young woman

must have become aware of this, too, Remus thought, when noticing Emily's ashen face. Suddenly she smiled, turned around and left the tent. Remus followed her. For a while they were walking side by side without one of them talking until Emily broke the silence and asked,

"When you were bitten?"

Remus riveted his gaze on the autumnal coloured leaves of the trees and murmured,

"I was five years old."

Even after so many years he only reluctantly remembered the event which had changed his life forever. The sympathy and understanding in Emily's grey eyes hit him unprepared but all of a sudden he realized that she too knew the pain of the transformations, the fear that someone would discover the secret and the contempt and disdain which was showed for you inevitably if the people discovered his condition.

"I was sixteen years old," Emily said dryly.

"Shortly afterwards I was expelled from Beauxbatons. The school couldn't afford it to allow me to stay. Were you taught at home?"

Remus shook his head.

"No, luckily I was able to go to Hogwarts. But this was only possible since Albus Dumbledore allowed it – he is a great person – and because of my friend James Potter. At that time his father was Minister of Magic. James has helped me incredibly much. He was a great friend and like a brother to me."

His voice trembled slightly. The memories still hurt. Emily, who was watching him closely, gently touched his arm.

"The pain never goes away, does he?" she said softly.

Remus gazed down at her small hand. He felt strangely drawn to the young woman and before he knew what he was doing he voiced what was tormenting him for a long time.

"It happened nearly three years ago. The Dark Lord killed James, his wife and his son. They were my family and I couldn't have prevented it. Harry was... only one year old."

His voice nearly broke, as the memories overwhelmed him.

She didn't say anything but the slight pressure of her hand comforted him. Her eyes, which looked at him, clouded over.

"It's always the children who suffer the most in a war," she murmured a moment later and turned towards the tents, where a little girl was crouching on the ground and was picking up chestnuts.

"Let's go. My uncle should have returned by now," Emily finally said and slowly they sauntered back to Charlotte and Sirius.

The little girl yawned. It was boring but she didn't leave the window seat where she sat and continued to look out of the window. Her mother had said that her father would return today and this he believed with all her might. She tried to remember how long her father had been away already but she didn't know it. To her it seemed to be incredibly long ago as he had read a goodnight story to her. The next day he had been away.

"Carolina, it's enough! Get immediately down there."

Caro flinched as she heard the voice of her mother. She didn't dare to object however so that she reluctantly slid off the window seat. Casting a glance back, she suddenly came to a halt.

"Dad," she whispered happily and like the wind she rushed upstairs and ran to the big entrance doors. Standing on tiptoe she tried to reach the handle. Although she managed it, she didn't succeed in opening the heavy doors. She looked up to her mother and wanted to ask if she couldn't help her. Her mother however had disappeared. So Caro had no choice but to wait. The time seemed to drag as she stared at the doors. Then they finally open and the tall black cloaked wizard spread out his arms.

The little black-haired girl laughed while she was whirled around by her father. Flinging her arms around him she said,

“Now you’ll never go away again, will you?”

Her father sighed and shook his head.

“I’ll have to go away still more times, Princess. But I will always come back.”

Caro repressed her disappointment.

“Do you promise me?”

“Yes, my darling. I’ll promise.”

Comforted Caro snuggled to her father, happy that she finally could once again feel secure.

Chapter 7

February 1985

In the same moment Severus and Alison kissed the sun broke through the clouds and turned the frozen lake and the grey snow into a glistening, gleaming white sea. Minerva McGonagall clapped and while she was smiling in tears, she regarded the young couple who had just married. Alison and Severus looked so happy. They seemed to have eyes only for each other. Minerva was glad that Severus had found someone whom he could love and Alison had such a lovely character.

"Aren't they a wonderful couple?" she whispered deeply moved and turned to Albus, who was standing beside her and had wrapped himself up firmly in his cape for protection against the cold.

"Yes, they are. It's a shame that they have to hide their happiness in future," Albus replied sadly.

Minerva stared uncomprehendingly at Albus. Seeing her look he added,

"Their marriage will have to remain a secret. It would be too dangerous if Voldemort would hear of this. Only the Inner Circle of the Order will know about their marriage and so it will stay. At least as so long we haven't defeated Voldemort."

Minerva sighed sadly. But she knew that Albus was undoubtedly right. It would be indeed too dangerous for Severus and Alison if the Dark Lord would discover their relationship. While watching how the newly-weds accepted the numerous congratulations she had to think involuntarily of the last wedding to which she had been invited.

James and Lily had been overjoyed, too and then it had ended in a tragedy. Hot tears burned in her eyes. She missed them so much and of course Harry, her godson, the sweet raven-haired baby, who had laughed at her with beaming eyes each time she had looked after the little one. Loud laughing rang out to her and Minerva emerged from the depths of her memories. She shouldn't be so sad and remember the Potters, not on Severus' and Alison's wedding. Hoping with all her

heart that the future of them wouldn't end so terrible, she went over to them.

Like all the others, Severus accepted Minerva's congratulations as well with a handshake and a brief word of thanks, though he couldn't have said with whom he had spoken afterwards. Constantly he looked over to Alison, whose hair was shining like melted gold in the sun. How he loved her! He hadn't wanted it, had fought tooth and nail against it and yet he had been powerless about his ever-increasing feelings in the end. All his attempts to persuade himself that he didn't love Alison had failed miserably. Only in the moment Alison had asked him straight out if he would marry her three months ago he had admitted to himself that he loved Alison more than anything else in the world. Nevertheless he had just looked at her wordlessly, not knowing what to answer since never had he wanted to endanger her through his fault. But Alison had said that she was already in danger, so it wouldn't change anything if they would marry.

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Thinking of that he felt how pleasant warmth seized him which however disappeared all of a sudden. It was confusing that someone

could feel so much happiness in one breath and simultaneously such terrible fear.

Just the thought of losing Alison scared him to death. With a jerk Severus turned around and relieved he saw Alison standing laughing beside Minerva and Poppy Pomfrey. She lifted her arm and threw the bridal bouquet up. The Weasley children ran screaming behind it and tried to catch the bunch of flowers, but it was in vain.

The flowers flew through the air and landed in the arms of Sirius Black. Severus snorted.

He couldn't understand why Alison had persisted to invite Black and Lupin. If he had been able to decide they would never have attended his wedding. And now that clown had indeed caught the bouquet. The guests laughed and applauded. Black grinned and bowed while Severus asked himself why they of all people had to attend his wedding.

Harry yawned and stared bad-temperedly onto the densely delineated parchment which was lying in front of him on the table. Since Bella had said him that his daily lessons were cancelled today – she hadn't even mentioned a reason – he had fought his way through the first tasks Bella had given him to work on but now he felt not the tiniest inclination to deal with those rather boring tasks any longer. Much more he liked it to do magic or to learn new spells.

That was a lot more interesting and exciting. In the beginning he had had a few difficulties to perform the various charms but after a while he had succeeded. His father had visited him a few times while Bella had been teaching him, had watched him and had even praised him.

Harry cast still a glance at the tasks, hesitated a moment and then slid from his chair. He would finish the tasks in the afternoon. Harry squinted at the door and bit his lip undecidedly. It would be great if he could explore the castle. Since his visit to Diagon Alley he had gradually realized how his chambers narrowed him down. It was boring to sit the whole day only in his rooms. He knew however that it was forbidden for him to leave his rooms.

But then Harry shrugged with his shoulders. He would just have to be careful and look out than no one would catch him. Calling Nell he asked her to open the door. The little house-elf stared at him with large eyes, nodded shortly afterwards and little later Harry was walking along the gloomy broad corridor. Nell toddled behind him.

The castle seemed to him gigantic and his eyes wandered curiously around. Pushing one of the heavy dark curtains a bit aside which covered up the big windows he startled flinched back as blinding light streamed in the dark corridor and let go abruptly of the curtain. Confused Harry stared at the curtain for a moment. Slowly he reached out with his hand again. This time he held onto the heavy fabric when blinking into the brightness. Amazed he looked at the white, glistening scenery.

"Nell, what's this?"

"That's snow, My Lord. In winter it's often snowing," Nell said in her high-pitched voice.

"Snow," Harry repeated awed.

Walking on Harry forget that he had to be careful and that it was forbidden for him to leave his chambers. It was much too interesting and exciting to explore the single rooms. In one of the rooms strange pictures were hanging on the walls on which frightening creatures were painted. Some of the doors were locked and because Nell told him that supporters of his father – whatever this should mean – were living there, he remembered again that he had to be careful, so he quickly went on. He followed a little winding staircase and opened the next door. Immediately his gaze was drawn to a large, blue four-poster bed. Harry, who already was a bit exhausted and whose legs began to hurt, sat down on the soft bed. A hissing voice caused him to jump up again.

"Always those stupid humans, must constantly disturb me."

Nells eyes widened terrified as she whispered urgently,

"It's a snake, My Lord. Please let's go."

Harry, who had overcome his first fright, was however more curious than fearful. Timidly he lifted the blue velvet blanket. A small curled-up snake came to the surface. She was black and had silvery squares on her back which shimmered in the light. Harry marvelled at the little animal and asked,

“What are you doing here?”

Nell flinched back and stared at her young master, who had just hissed in the same way like the snake moments ago. The little reptile had lifted its head and blinked at them,

“You can speak our language; how interesting. I was sleeping.”

“Sorry that we’ve woken you. Would you come with me?” Harry asked, who was fascinated greatly by the snake.

“Yes. Why not?” the reptile replied after a while of consideration and curled itself around Harry’s wrist, who had sat down on the bed again. Nell watched her charge with wide eyes. Although she knew that the snake wouldn’t do anything to him she was afraid for the child whom she loved so much. Harry, who didn’t notice anything of Nell’s worry for him, continued carefree his conversation with the small snake,

“What’s your name?” he wanted to know.

“My name is Diamond.”

“Diamond? That’s a funny name. I’m Harry.”

All of a sudden Harry and Nell froze. Someone was running with hurried strides past their only ajar door. The steps disappeared gradually and Harry heaved a sigh of relief. He stood up and realized how hungry he was. He had been away too long already and his tasks he as well had still to do. Since he didn’t know the way back to his rooms anymore he left the lead to Nell. Exhausted but happy he soon reached together with Nell and Diamond his rooms, glad that no one had seen him.

The next morning Bellatrix Lestrange stopped abruptly in her tracks when seeing a highly poisonous snake curled up around the arm of her pupil and heard how Harry was quietly talking to the animal. She regained her composure however quickly. She should have expected that the boy would possess this rare gift.

After all her master was as well a parselmouth. When Harry performed some spells a short while later and she was watching him, she thought that he surely would become a very powerful wizard one day. Never before had she seen that such a young child controlled these charms so perfectly. But she was incredibly relieved about Harry's talent. It saved her from a not exactly pleasant punishment.

It was good that her qualms that it would turn out to be difficult to teach the son of her master hadn't come true. Watching how Harry let a book hover some metres above the table, she made plans for giving her daughter, who was one year older than Harry, as well lessons in magic. Harry's progress was extremely satisfying so that Bella didn't slow down her steps when setting off to her master after the lessons to give him a report. When telling him that Harry had chosen a snake as his pet and he as well was a parselmouth, the reaction of the Dark Lord confused her completely. She had expected that he would answer this piece of news with a pleased nod. Instead he stared at her with his red eyes in a rather peculiar way.

"My Lord?" she dared to ask timidly.

The Dark Lord however didn't hear Bella. He was totally lost in his thoughts. This child did manage to surprise him over and over again. So Harry was a parselmouth. Without noticing it, he shook his head. How could this be possible? Only direct descendants of Salazar Slytherin possessed this rare gift and he himself was the last descendant of the great wizard. At least he had always believed this. Perhaps James Potter was descended from Salazar Slytherin. That would be possible after all. The Potters were an ancient wizard family. All of a sudden he became aware of the fact that Bella was still standing in front of him. Well, he would try to solve this mystery one day. But in the moment he was content with nodding shortly.

"That's indeed good news," he said and watched how Bella relaxed.

Chapter 8

September 1985

While the landscape rushed quickly past him, Charlie Weasley was sitting in the Hogwarts Express and was trying not to be too much excited that today his first year at Hogwarts would begin. Apart from him there was his two years older brother Bill with him in the compartment who had fallen asleep however a short time ago.

Sighing Charlie leaned back into the soft seat. He was relieved that the summer was over. Sadly he remembered the terrible day he had heard that his grandparents had been killed by Death Eaters.

In the following time they had tried to cope with the misery and while his mother had been often all tears, Bill and he had had to look after their younger siblings. Especially his four year old sister hadn't understood what had happened and Charlie had had much effort to distract her.

Charlie gripped his wand and thought back to his vow. He had vowed to become an Auror as soon as he would be finished with the school and that he would fight against the Dark Lord some day just as his parents who were members of the Order of the Phoenix. In the magic world the Order had already become a legend and was the last great hope in the fight against the Dark Lord and his supporters. He would also join the Order in distant future, he decided and looking at his wand, he thought back how difficult it had been to buy his school supplies.

Due to the danger some members of the Order had accompanied him, Bill and his father. How proud he had been when he had got his first wand, handed over by Ollivander's daughter who continued the wand shop since the murder of her father. She had been so nice and glancing out of the window, Charlie yawned and snuggled against the seat.

When the sunrays began to wander through the room, Harry blinked sleepily, laid an arm across his eyes and finally pulled the blanket over his head. He was still so tired but since he didn't succeed to fall

asleep anymore, he finally sat up and stared over at the window. Last night he had had one of his terrible nightmares again.

As always Nell had immediately come to him and had comforted him. Sometimes Harry wished that his father and Bella would hug him too but they never did.

Since he had bought his wand he often dreamed from the old friendly man and the green blinding light. Meanwhile he knew that it had been the Killing Course. Bella hadn't taught him this yet but he had read it himself. He frequently leafed through the books much further than he actually should. A while later when Harry had dressed and had eaten breakfast, he stepped to the door and opened it. Last month he had finally managed to find the right spell in one of the books Bella had given him and since then he was able to open his door alone and wasn't dependent on Nell's help anymore. Apart from this it was great fun to perform magic. Seeing that the corridor was deserted he silently padded out. Nell followed him. Ever since he had found Diamond he had often sneaked around the castle.

There was so much to discover and when he would get tired of exploring the castle he went to the enormous library of the castle, took one of the countless books and made it himself comfortable under the table most of the time. So he had often managed it to stay undiscovered, when someone had unexpectedly entered the library and thus hadn't been caught yet by any of his forays. Because Bella had told him yesterday that she would be unable to come and wouldn't therefore teach him today, Harry knew that he could take so much time as he wanted and hadn't have to pay attention to return back to his room in time.

In a great mood he climbed up one of the stairs which led to one of the towers. In a dusty, little room he discovered all kinds of old junk and behind a broken chest of drawers he found a broom. Happily about his finding he took the broom, after removing some spider's webs, to a bigger room and tried to fly.

He knew it immediately. Flying was easy and he could it. But in the room wasn't exactly much space so that he landed shortly afterwards and pondered whereto he could go. His first thought was to go to the

Great Hall; there however the danger was of course great that someone could spot him. Looking at Nell he asked the little house-elf, if she didn't know a suitable place for flying.

After a moment of consideration Nell suggested the park. Harry hesitated for an instant. He had never been in the park before but since the day he had seen into the, at that time, snow-covered park he had wished to go out one day. So far he hadn't done it however, out of fear he would run into someone. In the castle were many hiding places which he could use in an emergency but he didn't know if he would find so good possibilities in the park as well.

Finally his curiosity and his desire to really try out his broom won and he let Nell to show him the way. They had hardly entered the park when Nell led him along one of the narrow pathways while Harry was looking amazed at the tress which struck him so much taller now as he had seen them out of his window. A little while later he was flying in the warm sun. A never known feeling of freedom seemed to fill him while flying higher and higher.

Nell, who was sitting behind him, held desperately onto his waist in the meantime. Harry laughed. Flying was just great. Soon he became more daring and even tried out a nosedive which caused Nell to cry out loudly. After a while as it began to get dark he flew to the ground and sauntered, still beaming with joy, slowly back to the castle. He knew that he would hardly be able to wait for the next day. His mood darkened as he remembered that he would have time only in the afternoon to sneak in the park and to fly. Hopefully Bella wouldn't give him so much homework.

Loud voices startled him. Nell had heard them, too. Frightened her eyes widened. Harry's eyes darted around and just in time he managed to hide with Nell behind two bushes so that the black figures who went past didn't notice them. Relieved Harry who had held his breath let it slowly escape. He straightened up and saw how the supporters of his father walked to the castle. Looking around he made sure that no one else was nearby. Then he picked up his broom from the ground and whispered to Nell who had put her hands before her eyes that they could go now and started to move. He grasped Nell's hand and ran across the lawn.

Reaching his rooms out of breath, Harry sank exhausted on his bed, glad that his excursion in the park had stayed undiscovered. Why on earth had his father forbidden him to leave his chambers? He didn't understand it.

Chapter 9

April 1986

It was late afternoon and the first nice day for weeks in which it had rained one minute and had snowed the next. Cold and foggy it had been just uncomfortable outside so that no one had left Hogwarts if it hadn't been absolutely necessary. Nearby the lake Sirius, Remus, Charlotte and Emily sat together on a blanket and enjoyed the warming sunbeams which were breaking through the clouds. Since they had met in France they had become good friends.

When the Order of the Phoenix and the French resistance group had begun to work together the two sisters had often come to Hogwarts, had delivered messages or had received Albus' assignments. Remus and Emily had fallen in love with each other and a few weeks ago Remus had finally mustered enough courage to ask the young woman for her hand. Overjoyed Emily had agreed. Little later she had moved to Hogwarts.

When the teacher of Defence against the Dark Arts had been murdered Albus Dumbledore had searched despairingly for a replacement and had finally offered the position to the four young Aurors so that Charlotte had moved to Hogwarts as well. It wasn't easy to share the position but since they spoke about the lessons and adjusted to each other this arrangement had functioned well so far. So, at least, not many lessons had to be cancelled when urgent tasks for the Order had to be carried out. The subject Potions was also taught alternately by Severus Snape and his wife. In Hogwarts it was an open secret that the students liked Alison Lennox much more than Professor Snape.

While the four friends were sitting comfortably together, many people passed them. Since Hogwarts had become a refuge and a place which the Dark Lord hadn't conquered yet – despite a few attempts to do so – it had become almost a little town. Even a few Muggle children, whose parents had been killed, lived here.

As the Dark Lord and his followers had murdered so many Muggles in the last years it had become virtually impossible to keep the magic

world secret any longer. It wouldn't take long any more and the Muggles would discover that next to their world another one existed.

On this day however the four young people didn't think of the magic world being on the verge of a catastrophe.

"Did you hear that Charlie Weasley is supposed to be an excellent flyer? When one of the older students will graduate next year, he'll definitely get on the Quidditch team!" Sirius just said and his gaze wandered in direction of the Quidditch field.

"Perhaps Gryffindor then will win once again!" Remus replied and bit into his apple.

Since Remus, Sirius and their friends had left school Gryffindor hadn't managed it once to gain the Quidditch cup. Last year Hufflepuff had won and this unexpected victory had nearly shocked the whole school. In the years before the coveted cup had been handed over mainly to the Slytherins and this although the number of students in Slytherin had decreased very much over the years. The Death Eaters who supported the Dark Lord in public didn't send their children to Hogwarts. Those who supported him but wore masks and tried to convince the world of the opposite allowed their children to attend the only magic school in Britain. Of course not all Slytherin students had Death Eaters as parents, it were many however.

While Sirius and Remus were chatting about Quidditch, Charlotte and Emily exchanged a smile. Both knew how Quidditch obsessed their friends were. But to talk about hobbies or other unimportant things was bitterly necessary in those horrible times in which you were seized constantly with fear, had to fight for your own live and had to witness murder and torture and dreadful tragedies. They all suffered greatly from the war, everyone had come away with scars on their souls but they had no alternative but to live and to fight.

Emily leant against the tremendous chestnut and regarded Remus while listening more to his voice than to his words. She loved him and wouldn't have been the war she would have been perfectly happy without a doubt.

But instead countless fears were bothering her. Had they actually a future? She knew how hard it was for Severus and Alison with whom she had become friends. Their marriage was strained greatly under the need to keep it secret and to be always careful to avoid giving it away, under the daily stress and Severus' work as a spy.

She wouldn't be able to bear it, if something should happen to Remus; Emily thought and felt how an icy coldness seized her. They understood each other as no one else could and Emily couldn't imagine any more to live without him. For one moment her nails dug into her palms. Remus sat opposite of her, he was fine; she assured herself. The singing high-pitched sound of a phoenix, which her bracelet suddenly emitted, caused her to freeze to ice. She gazed down on the narrow silver band and read the glowing message which had appeared there:

'Attack in Cheltenham!'

One year ago one of the members of the Order of the Phoenix had come up with the idea to use the bracelets and they had been surprised which unexpected advantages this method brought along with. To communicate among each other so quickly had been not possible before. The bracelets also enabled them to pass the wards which surrounded Hogwarts without reciting some complicated spells like they had done before.

Emily stood up and looked up. All joy and lightheartedness had disappeared from the faces of her sister and Remus' and Sirius'. Only grim determination was left. Together they ran to the Apparation place and Emily stretched out her hand. Remus grabbed her and for a brief moment she saw the same fear in his eyes. Would they survive the present day? Shortly afterwards the young Aurors had disappeared to do what destroyed them slowly.

One hour later Poppy Pomfrey took care of the injured people from the attack in Cheltenham. Desperately she tried to help the many victims. The hospital wing had to be magically enlarged since it had been too small.

As Poppy had tended one of the injured she stared at the sight which extended itself in front of her eyes. 'Whom should she help first?' The

decision was however taken away from her. Remus Lupin, closely followed by Emily who was beside herself, came storming through the door. In his arms he carried an unconscious woman.

“Poppy, quick! She has been cursed with the Cruciatus Curse!” he shouted and placed the woman carefully on a bed from which he had to scare off two young wizards. Poppy hurried to Remus and Emily and realized the reason for their worried faces. It was Alison, the wife of Severus Snape, who she liked very much.

“Will she survive?” Remus asked hesitatingly.

Poppy nodded slightly.

“I think so, but she has lost her child.” Poppy sighed sadly.

It had been only a few weeks ago when Alison had come to her and they had discovered her two- month pregnancy. The young woman had been so happy.

Remus turned around, cursed and stormed out to fight again, while Emily stayed with Alison and held her hand. Compassion seized her as she stared into Alison’s white face. She brushed a strand of hair out of Alison’s face and looking first at the many wounded people and then to Poppy she asked:

“How can I help?”

Chapter 10

August 1986

While the sun was shining glaringly from the sky and the gentle wind was breezing through the tops of the trees, Harry was filled again with an indescribable feeling of freedom. Gripping his broom tighter, he cheerily flew higher and higher. Whenever he flew he felt happy. Unfortunately he didn't manage to sneak into the park nowhere as frequently as he would have wished.

"Not so fast, Harry. I don't like this." Diamond hissed.

Harry laughed and gazed down at his little snake, who had curled herself tightly around his arm. Nell had got used to flying over the months but his snake absolutely didn't like it, if he decreased his speed or flew loops.

A moment later Harry landed on the ground. He lowered his arm and said,

"If you don't like it get off my arm and stay on the ground."

The black-silver reptile hissed angrily and slid off Harry's arm and wriggled into the tall grass in which the raven haired boy lost sight of Diamond rather quickly. Just as Harry wanted to climb on his broom again he heard strange sounds. It sounded like singing. Never before had he heard something like this. The singing was beautiful. Fascinated Nell was listening as well. Harry looked around and saw that something was shimmering through a few bushes. Curiously he began to walk in the direction from which the singing could be heard. He bent the green twigs aside and held his breath. It was a phoenix. With wide eyes Harry stared at the magical bird.

It was black but it wasn't a real black. When the light hit the feathers different colours shimmered through. Harry walked round the bush and knelt down. The phoenix turned its head and they looked at each other. Black glistening eyes riveted on him. Carefully Harry reached out with his hand stroked over the soft feathers. The phoenix let it happened.

"You are beautiful, aren't you? Do you want to stay with me?" Harry asked and wasn't astonished in the least as the phoenix trilled and inclined its head.

"I'll stay with you," she sang.

Harry smiled but then he suddenly remembered something he had read in one of his books.

"Why can I understand you? I thought that it is impossible for a human to understand magical creatures."

"I don't know. I sense something strange in you, similar to a phoenix."

The answer surprised Harry but since it didn't make any sense to him he shrugged with his shoulders. He admired the brightly shimmering feathers and had an idea.

"May I call you Rainbow?"

"If you want; I like it."

The young woman stood motionless like a statue on the shore and stared with a blank gaze at the lake. Her long golden hair was dull and her eyes had lost their former twinkling. Cheerful laughter rang out to her and Alison flinched. She turned around and caught sight of two little children who were playing with each other.

For a tiny moment she watched them. Then she spun around and hurried away with long strides. Furious she hit with her hand against one of the trees which she passed. Giving a loud sob she slid slowly to the ground. She couldn't bear it to know that it had been her fault. If she hadn't gone to Cheltenham, she wouldn't have lost her child. Alison dug her nails into the bark and pressed her face against the tree. She had loved it to look at the lake, to run over the meadows and to roam through the forests but since that fatal day everything had only provoked an incredible indifference in her.

She could only think at her lost child, she imagined how he would have looked like one day and talked with him. Her despair and her self-reproaches haunted her even in her dreams.

Emily and Charlotte had tried to cheer her up but they didn't understand her. Even Severus didn't understand her. The last months they had only quarrelled. Alison began to sob as overwhelming fury at the war, that had killed her child, rose in her. What was the point of living on? She had lost her child. All of a sudden she felt strong arms which embraced her and while Severus pulled her close to him, she didn't struggle against his touch. Crying she clung to him. Blinded by tears she lifted her head. They held and kissed each other as if never wanting to let go anymore and Alison realized that her life did had still a sense.

The hurried steps of the children echoed through the dark castle as they ran down the broad staircase. A Death Eater, who had appeared at the bottom of the stairs, clicked disapprovingly his tongue and the two children reduced their speed while exchanging a look. The black-haired girl, who was almost a year older than the silver-blond boy at her side, walked ahead and led them through interlocking corridors to a small terrace. Going down the few steps, Caro entered the green lawn. Draco jumped behind.

"And what shall we do now?" he asked in a bored voice.

"Certainly it'll take forever until they've finished." he added and thought of the Death Eater meeting their parents currently attended. How he would have wanted to be there as well. That would be at least exciting instead of this waiting. Unfortunately Draco had only wrested the permission from his father to accompany their parents to the castle but now he realized that they could have stayed just as well at home. Suddenly a movement on the horizon attracted however his attention. He squinted and shouted:

"There is someone flying! Come!"

Caro's gaze followed his outstretched arm.

“Wait, Draco. You know that our parents have forbidden us to leave the castle.”

But Draco ignored Caro’s objection and began to run in the direction where he had seen the figure. Caro shrugged her shoulders and began to run, too.

Out of breath they stopped finally, cast their eyes heavenwards and admired the vertical flights. Draco whistled appreciatively and as the raven-haired boy landed on the ground a while later, Draco stepped out of the trees’ shadow and asked,

“Who are you?”

The strange boy whirled around and stared at them with large startled eyes but he seemed to relax shortly afterwards.

“I’m Harry and you?” he answered.

“My name is Draco Malfoy and this is Carolina Lestrangle.”

“Caro,” the girl interrupted him.

Draco nodded and continued,

“Nice to meet you. You are flying fantastically by the way. We’re flying as well. What do you think of playing Quidditch together?” Draco suggested expectantly.

Harry smiled and said then,

“Yes, that would be great. But we’ve to be careful because I’m not allowed outside. My father has forbidden it. Please don’t say anyone you have met me.”

Draco raised one eye-brow. Before he could however open his mouth Caro asked with a frown,

“Forbidden? Why? And what’s your mother saying to this?”

Harry blinked at them.

"I don't know. I haven't a mother," he said slowly.

A loud angry voice caused the children to spin around.

"Draco! Where are you?"

"That's my father. We've to go. We certainly will come back.", Draco sighed while deciding firmly that he would persuade his father to take them along tomorrow as well to the castle of the Dark Lord; this time however with their brooms.

Harry nodded disappointingly.

"That would be nice but please say nothing to your parents."

Caro shook her head.

"If you don't want it, we won't say anything. Bye Harry."

Draco still cast a glance at the raven-haired boy, turned around then as well and disappeared together with Caro between the trees.

Later in that night Harry tossed and turned restlessly in his bed. Since his thoughts were occupied with the today's happenings he just couldn't manage to fall asleep. He was so happy that he had met Draco and Caro. Finally he would have friends with whom he could play. He wondered if they would come tomorrow. Caro had given him however something to think about. For the first time in his life he thought about his mother and wondered why he hadn't any.

Where was she? What had happened to her? He refused to believe that she had left him. Pressing his pillow tightly to him he felt a painful yearning. But after what exactly he couldn't say. When finally falling asleep, he dreamed of a shadowy woman, who held him in her arms and sung him a lullaby. Her face however he couldn't see.

So deeply Harry slept that he didn't notice how the Dark Lord entered his room, stepped to his bed, stopped and regarded him. A thoughtful expression darted across his face. With six years Harry was now old

enough to learn who counted to his endless enemies, including that old fool Dumbledore and above all the child had to learn his place in the world. The boy was intelligent and that would undoubtedly simplify his lessons. He would also teach him Parsel- magic.

Since Harry possessed this rarely gift it would be stupidity not to use it. Satisfied Voldemort ran his hand over his chin and thought exultantly of Harry being soon able to help him to rule over the world. At least in a few years, the Dark Lord restricted his expectations resignedly.

Chapter 11

April 1987

Although the hall was festively decorated and merry laughter was ranging out to him Severus' expression was gloomy and so the grim looking wizard didn't seem to fit very well to the exuberant party. Severus Snape sighed and asked himself why he had to attend the weddings of Black and Lupin. It had been a surprise to hear that Sirius and Charlotte would marry as well. If you really thought about it however, then he should have been able to foreseen it.

Ever since James Potter had been murdered Black and Lupin were as close as brothers, so that probably it wasn't so surprising when they married at the same time and then even sisters, Severus thought cynically. What should he do here? While he was uselessly wasting his time here he could have been brewing potions. Impatiently he began to clear a path to one of the tables. He wanted to fetch a butter beer and grinded his teeth as he had to squeeze his way through a flock of children.

His eyes fell on the beaming faces of Black and Lupin. All of a sudden he felt how bitter jealousy seized him. It was just unfair that they were so happy.

There was no necessity for them to keep their marriage secret and Charlotte and Emily, both looking stunningly beautiful, foamed virtually with genuine happiness while Alison still hadn't recovered from her miscarriage. Sipping at his butter beer he looked around. After a while he finally spotted Alison. She was talking with Mrs Weasley. Alison smiled but her smile didn't reach her eyes. Severus however was glad even over the smallest progress. He had been beside himself with worry when Alison had lost all her spirits. All her happiness and lightheartedness had vanished and Severus hadn't known how he should help Alison. Of course he had been sad as well about the incident.

It hadn't however affected him as greatly as it had Alison. But the worst had been her looks in her eyes when he had gone to the Death Eater meetings. They had been so reproachful, Severus remembered

and her love had changed into hatred. Perhaps she had also sensed that he had felt a certain relief.

He hadn't wanted that his child would be born in such a time. In a time of war and dread, in which it happened almost daily that children lost their parents and were left behind as orphans.

Only since that day he had found Alison clutching to that tree and he had drawn her tightly in his arms, their relationship to each other had changed and slowly Alison had got out of her severe depression.

Alison turned her head; their gazes met and in Severus hope was rising that some day everything would be alright again. A searing pain in his arm caused him to flinch. The Dark Lord was calling him. He stared over to Alison and touched his arm. As she nodded understandingly, he abruptly spun around and with moderate steps left the hall.

Harry squinted and with his hand guarded his eyes against the blinding sun beams while combing the horizon. Somewhere the Snitch had to be and he wanted to find the little golden ball before Caro and Draco by all means. Ever since they had met each other last year, the two had often come to the park, when their parents had attended a Death Eater meeting. As the winter had moved into the land they had played inside the castle. Especially playing hide-and-seek went greatly. There were so many suitable places. Quickly they had become inseparable friends and every time they had to go Harry hoped that Caro and Draco would return soon and missed them in the meanwhile.

"Harry!" Draco shouted and Nell, who was sitting behind him and had flung her arms around his waist, screamed.

His head whirled around and he saw a Bludger shooting towards him with breathtaking speed.

With a fast dive he barely managed to avoid it.

"Blimey, that was the greatest fly I ever seen, Harry!" Caro yelled.

Harry straightened, ran his trembling hand over his forehead and rose against in the sky. Such things were bound to happen, if you didn't pay attention, Harry thought. Not that it would have been so terrible, if the Bludger had hit him. Since they had begun to play Quidditch, every one of them had sustained more than one injury, what wasn't very surprising in this sport. A few weeks ago he had broken his arm. Fortunately Rainbow had healed him. For such things his phoenix was just irreplaceable.

But for several moments it had been very painful and Harry shuddered as he thought back. Only Rainbow's appearance had released him from his agony. Thanks to the healing abilities of his phoenix Bella hadn't noticed anything however and hadn't got suspicious. Also Caro and Draco had needed help of Rainbow often enough. By accident Harry had discovered that he was able to call Rainbow to him with a shrill scream. Every time he screamed in such a way Rainbow would come immediately to him. That was why it wasn't further bad if Rainbow flew away for a while. Harry knew after all that his phoenix would return to him and as strange it sounded there seemed to exist a magically bond between them. Draco's loud voice caused him to look up abruptly.

"Yes, I've hit." Draco shouted with a triumphant expression on his face.

Because they were only three players, they had changed the rules for their Quidditch games. Every one of them had to score as many goals as possible and due to their lack of a Quidditch field, everyone had his own tree. When the player hit his tree, he would get points. The one who caught the Snitch ended the game and who had then the most points won. Of course they had to look out for the Bludgers as well. Although everyone had to play more then one position this way, they had the most fun playing in such a way.

"Harry! Draco! Let's make a break!" Caro suggested and landed onto the soft grass.

The boys followed and soon they were sitting on a blanket and were eating delicious blueberry cakes.

Nell always provided them with little snacks. In the beginning Draco had been rather mean to the small house-elf. He hadn't been used to treat a house-elf nicely. After Harry however had got seriously angry one time and had reprimanded his friend, Draco had slowly changed his behaviour over the months. Harry's anger and his emerald eyes, which had glistened dangerously and the hardly visible golden aura that had seemed to surround him for a short moment, Draco didn't forget so fast.

Caro took a sip from her coolly juice, brushed a black strand of hair out of her face and said:

"This time, I'll win!"

"This we'll see." Harry replied and smiled. Draco nodded in support and the boys exchanged a glance.

While Harry was playing Quidditch with his friends, he didn't suspect that the Death Eater meeting ended earlier as it usually did and the Dark Lord had drawn Bellatrix Lestrange aside and had told her that he wanted to see his son. Bella promptly set off to the chambers of the young Lord. As she opened the door however, she found the rooms deserted and there was far and away no sight of the boy. She stepped inside und looked into Harry's bedroom but no one was there as well.

Suddenly she shrieked and shrunk back. She had almost stepped on Harry's snake. Shuddering she turned around. How she hated those creatures! It was bad enough to endure Nagini, the pet of the Dark Lord. She left his room and wondered where the young Lord could only have gone to. Shaking with her head, she sighed. Why hadn't she noticed that he had learned to open his door? Where should she search first?

Hoping that he hadn't been seen by anyone, she hurried along the dark corridor. After her search in the library had turned out to be unsuccessful as well, she run downstairs to the great hall and collided with Lucius Malfoy but called only a choppy apology out to him and rushed on. She could imagine the annoyance of the Dark Lord only too well if he had to wait even longer.

Lucius Malfoy stared rather irritated after Bella, then shrugged with his shoulders and continued together with his wife to search for their son. Why his son had to have such an incredible ability to constantly disappear?

Now he and Narcissa were once again forced to search for him and Carolina, who they had practically adopted.

For him it was an absolutely mystery why Bella had got herself pregnant as she took care for her daughter as good as never. Probably due to Rodolphus, Lucius thought. Ever since Draco had been born Bella had visited his house countless times and had just left her daughter with them for a rather long time, without caring if he agreed to this at all. You could really almost say that Narcissa had brought up Carolina. Only in those times when Bella's husband, Rodolphus Lestranger, had returned home from his mysterious missions, Carolina stayed with her parents.

"Perhaps they've gone into the park." Narcissa thought loudly and stepped onto the terrace. Lucius followed and together they walked over the lawn. As they reached the park, they heard cheerful laughing. With great strides Lucius went around the old trees and his eyes fell on three children who sat on a blanket.

"Draco! What are you doing there?"

The children turned jerkily their heads to him. But it seemed that no one of them knew what to say.

"Dad, we only played." Draco finally broke the silence.

Lucius Malfoy raised one eyebrow nodded in the direction of Harry.

"And who's this?" he asked and studied the raven-haired boy, whom he had never seen before, he was certain about that. How strange his eyes were and the scar on his forehead resembled a flash of lightning.

Before Harry could however answer Lucius' question, Bella appeared between the trees. Her cheeks were red and obviously she was out of breath. Gasping for air she said,

“My Lord, thank goodness, nothing has happen to you.” Bella felt how relief streamed through her. As she hadn’t been able to find Harry anywhere, she had already imagined all sorts of things which could have happen. Now she had only to think, what she should say, why it had taken so long. If Harry had disappeared, she didn’t want to know what the Dark Lord would have done to her. Suddenly she noticed Lucius and Narcissa who were staring at Harry and her with unbelieving expressions on their faces. Her daughter and Draco she saw as well.

“My Lord?” Lucius repeated with a strange sounding voice.

Bella sighed. So now it had happened. She knew that her master wouldn’t be exactly pleased to hear that the secret had been discovered. Furthermore it seemed that of all people her daughter and Draco had made friends with her lord’s son. But that obviously couldn’t be changed anymore.

“Yes, Harry is our master’s son and heir. The Dark Lord has however ordered that his identity remains a secret.”

Turning towards Harry, she requested,

“My Lord, would you please return to your rooms?”

Harry nodded and asked,

“Can Caro and Draco come with me?”

The black-haired woman hesitated shortly but then she nodded.

“Of course, My Lord.”

While Nell was quickly rolling up the blanket, the children set off back to the castle.

“Why did you never tell us?” Draco asked with a slight respectful voice and stared at Harry with wide eyes.

Harry shrugged with his shoulders, not knowing whether he should be glad that his friends were now in the picture about his true identity.

"I don't know, somehow I never thought of it."

"But we don't have to address you with My Lord, do we?" Caro threw in.

"No, of course not. I'm still Harry for you." He replied rather sharply.

"It was only a joke, Harry. Hey, I've an idea. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be taught together?"

Harry stopped and his eyes lighted up.

"That would be so great. Together with you the lessons would be certainly much more fun."

Caro smiled and shortly afterwards shook her head.

"I can't believe that my mother was your teacher and she never told me."

"Yes, I think my father will be rather furious that he hadn't the faintest idea about your existence. He's absolutely convinced of being the right hand of the Dark Lord." Draco added.

In the meantime the adults as well were walking back to the castle. Bella had told Lucius and Narcissa everything she knew. Draco had been right with his assumption. His father was angry; very. Bella had known it but he hadn't? Hadn't his lord trusted him? *A son and heir!* He couldn't believe it. Abruptly realizing what that would mean, he frowned unwillingly.

This child, with these bright green eyes would be the right hand of his master some day, and in the distant future – very probably – even his future master! He had to think about it, extremely thoroughly and this as soon as possible.

Chapter 12

March 1988

It was a cold and frosty day as Charlotte sauntered slowly through the small garden, in which the first colourful crocuses and snowdrops of the year began to blossom. She held her face out towards the sun and went to the little bench, where she carefully sat down. In a few weeks her child would be born. Charlotte could hardly await the moment she would finally hold her baby in her arms. Happily smiling she laid a hand on her belly and felt the kicking movements of her child.

Abruptly her beaming smile disappeared and fear sneaked into her dark blue eyes. She hated to admit it but she was worried. Her fears gave her sleepless nights; she knew however that her dread was justified. Asking herself if she actually had the right to give birth to a child in this terrible and war-ridden world, she doubted more and more often that she would be able to protect her baby. She knew which tragedy had happened to the Potters and their son. Her husband still mourned over the deaths of his best friends and his little godson. She had often caught him staring at pictures of them, with an expression of sadness and guilt in his eyes. He had forbidden her however to take the pictures away.

Sirius, she thought and a painful longing seized her. The fear that something could happen to him in the course of her absence was overpowering. She remembered the carelessness and lightheartedness of her childhood, which seemed to be so incredibly far away. She had nearly forgotten already how it felt to not having to worry and to be afraid every day. Yawning she leaned back. Ever since she was pregnant, she was in a permanent condition of tiredness. But Poppy had calmed her and had said that it wasn't anything unusual. Alison as well suffered occasionally from the same symptoms. Alison also was pregnant and her child would be born to the same time as hers. Charlotte felt how her baby kicked her strongly and her thoughts riveted on a future without war and without fear.

The little girl trembled like a leaf while she was trying to hide behind the large wall clock, which was standing in the hall. Her big brown eyes were wide and were fixed upon her parents, who were surrounded by several black figures. A few instants ago she had been sitting in her room and had played with her dolls as an ear-splitting noise had shook the house.

Most startled she had run to the staircase and had seen the strangers. They were wizards, she was absolutely sure of this. Although her father had always said that no wizards existed and had brushed aside all the rumours and stories as lies, she had been convinced that they were true since never had she forgotten the bedtime stories of her grandma, which had been about a magic world and wizards and witches.

While her mother fell to the floor and began to scream and her father was desperately struggling to free himself of invisible bonds, she whimpered and pressed herself closer to the smooth wood of the old wall clock.

“Mum, Dad.” she whispered.

The sneering laughter of the wizards rang in her ears. She wanted to run away, to scream, to help her parents but she was incapable of moving. It seemed so that she had frozen to ice in her corner. A raven-haired man, whose left cheek was disfigured by an ugly scar, stepped out of his companions' circle, lifted his wand and a glaring green light hit her father, who slumped to the ground with a slight turn and remained lying motionless. A second figure grabbed her mother's arm, yanked her to her feet and pushed her against the wall. Suddenly, with a strange sound countless people appeared from nowhere in the hall and startled the girl flinched back. Those strangers however wore vivid scarlet cloaks. Instantly they turned towards their attackers. The little girl couldn't do anything else than to helplessly watch the fiercely fighting.

While Sirius Black was blocking the curses of a slightly plump wizard he had to think – to the most unsuitable time – of his wife. Would he ever see her again? And would he be alive when his child would be

born? Currently Charlotte was in France and was visiting her aunt and uncle over the weekend. How he wished to be with her now.

“Sirius!” a voice screamed a warning to him and Sirius spun around.

With a big leap Sirius could just in time save himself from a spell, another Death Eater had intended for him. Turning again towards his original opponent, he fought on and killed him a moment later while cursing about his inattentiveness which had nearly cost his life and forced his thoughts to concentrate again upon the fight. An agonizing scream distracted him once more. For a fraction of a second he turned his head and saw a woman, obviously a Muggle, clinging desperately to a man who was lying on the floor. Sirius knew that the woman hadn’t any chance to survive this hell without help. But before he could get to her, she was hit with the Killing Curse. He saw her falling and with a rage beyond description he threw himself in the fight.

Brutally he attacked and instead of the unknown woman he saw Lily and James in front of him. Now he only wanted to kill and did so then. Only when no one of the black dressed Death Eaters was left, Sirius lowered panting his wand and came again to his senses. For one moment he was taken aback about the fact that the death of so many people did not touch him particularly but then he shrugged his shoulders. They were Death Eaters after all, his enemies.

Lifting up his hand, he ran it over his hair. Slowly relief rose in him, he had survived. In the chaos of scarlet robes it was impossible for him to spot Remus or Emily. ‘Please, let them be alive.’ he prayed forcefully and while looking around he noticed something that caused him to hold his breath.

Next to a large wall clock, which was standing in a corner, a little girl was sitting. Her knees she had drawn up and she pressed herself so close to the wall, as if she wanted to disappear. Sirius went to her, kneeled down and spoke in a soft voice:

“Hello, little one. I’m Sirius Black and you?”

She didn’t move and indicated through nothing that she had heard him. Sirius reached out his hand and cautiously lifted her chin. She

stared at him with wide brown eyes but their expression was completely blank.

Great, he thought, she obviously had got a shock. Since she had witnessed the murder of her parents, it certainly wasn't much surprising. He felt how his heart clenched with sympathy for her. To leave her here alone, he wouldn't bring himself to do this. He had to help her. The best would be to get her first to a safe place. He took her by her arms and picked her up. She didn't resist but he felt how her small body was trembling fiercely. Since he could find neither Remus nor Emily, he apparated alone to Hogwarts. Thanks to his bracelet he passed the wards without any difficulties and hurried with the girl towards the castle.

Arriving there, he brought the girl to his rooms. Poppy would have enough to do with the injured ones and wouldn't have time anyway to take care of the child. After brief reflection what would be the best in such a situation, he wrapped the girl – according to his guess, she was about seven years old – in a warm blanket and made her a hot glass of tea. While he was helping her to drink, he told her about his Hogwarts times. Most of it what he told her was incoherent rubbish. But his silly babbling was certainly much better than oppressive silence. As the ideas ran out what else he could say, he tried a second time to ask for her name. This time she answered in a hardly audible voice,

“Hermione Granger.”

“Neville! Come immediately down!”

Charlie Weasley wished that he had never given in to Ron's wish to teach him and his friend Neville how to fly. But his little brother had got so long on his nerves that he finally had agreed. So he had gone with them to the Quidditch field and had just wanted to begin with his explanation what was important when flying as Neville, who had been more than nervous, unexpectedly had shot in the air and now couldn't control his broom. Seconds later the boy crashed into the ground.

“Neville, are you alright?” screamed Ron and ran to his friend.

Charlie followed at a fast pace, while praying that Neville was unhurt. Meanwhile Neville had sat up and looked at them with a slightly dazed gaze. Holding his wrist, he murmured with pained expression on his face.

"I think I've broken my wrist, Charlie."

Sighing Charlie bent down and helped Neville up.

"Then come. Let's go to the hospital wing."

"But, tomorrow we continue, yes?" asked Ron.

"Perhaps."

Charlie smiled at his brother. Basically he wasn't surprised however that his brother wanted to learn flying so eagerly to be able to play Quidditch. Their whole family were obsessed with the game. If they hadn't been at war, Ron and Neville would have been able to fly long ago but so nobody had had the time to teach them. Probably it would have been the best if they had tried it out alone, at least when their mother wouldn't have forbidden it. Charlie thought that her behaviour was a bit exaggerated but you couldn't do anything against it. She was also always afraid that he injured himself at Quidditch games. Although everyone who had seen him flying, described him as a natural talent. Since his second school-year he played for his house and he loved it. His brother Bill was as well on the team.

He had tried to persuade Bill to come along. Bill however had refused to help him to teach Ron and Neville how to fly, having said that he had no time and had to learn for his OWL which he would have this summer. Because he wanted to become an Auror, he needed good marks. But Charlie suspected that that wasn't the real reason. He had seen how Bill had looked at a pretty Ravenclaw girl and that he had given her a little letter yesterday. It was more likely that his brother would spend his time with her. But perhaps he should ask his friends if they could help him.

After his wife had tended his minor injuries which he had sustained in the battle that had taken place earlier this day, Lucius Malfoy leaned

back in his armchair and stared with a frown in the lively flickering fire which was warming the room pleasantly. Lucius was thinking. Ever since he had discovered that the Dark Lord had a son, he had been thinking. Such a long pondering was rather unusual for him. Normally he always made decisions quickly. But in this case he didn't know what he should do. At the beginning he had toyed with the idea to kill the child. Only for a brief time, though, since it would have been actually impossible to put this into action.

The young Lord was either in the company of Draco and Carolina, Bella's or of his father. It was out of the question that he did it in the presence of the Dark Lord and just as little he could do it in the presence of his son. Apart from that it was too dangerous.

Even if the undertaking should be successful, if the Dark Lord would ever find it out, he would be dead. Not only he but his family would be punished as well and this he wanted to risk on no account. In addition, although there was the fact that Harry would hold the position which he strived for some day: to become the right hand of his master – a position he had to share with Bella at the moment – but if that would be such a disadvantage for him, he couldn't say at that point in time. He would wait, see what the future would bring and if the necessity would arise for action he would take the required measures.

Yawning Harry stared at Bella's curved handwriting. The last quarter of an hour he had spent with reading his homework, which had turned out to be rather difficult, over and over again. Up to now nothing had however fallen into place how to solve the task. Casting a glance at his phoenix he considered for a moment to send a call for help to his friends but dismissed the thought directly afterwards. Although they were now learning together, he still knew more than his friends, so that it was rather unlikely that they would be able to help him along.

For getting lessons in magic since he had been four years old, this wasn't very surprising after all. Draco and Caro had begun to learn the arts of magic only much later. Yet Harry had been shortly before fearing that it would be forbidden to them. But he had begged his father to allow Draco and Caro to remain his friends and his father had agreed. As he thought of his father, it occurred to him that he

could ask his father for the solution of his homework. After all he would come to him soon.

Shortly after his sixth birthday his father had begun to come to him two or three times a week and taught him spells and curses in Parsel or told him who their enemies were. His father had explained him that Muggles and those wizards who fought against his father were evil. Also other creatures were worthless, apart from a Pureblood wizard who was on their side. Harry never thought much about it. He just learned it. Only in one case he could and did not want to agree with his father that house-elves were worthless creatures. Although he hadn't said it, he thought it. Never would he consider Nell to be worthless; the only one who took really care of him and who had been there for him as long as he could remember.

Noticing how warm it had become in his room, he stood up and sleepily went to the window. The cold air had an invigorating effect on him. He leaned forwards and stared into the park. While looking at the wall which surrounded the castle and the park, he realized that the last time he had left the castle had been when he had bought his wand. Suddenly he felt the desire to leave the castle and see other places. But why shouldn't he go out? There was no reason not to do it, was it? He was the son of the Dark Lord after all. It shouldn't be a problem. If he and his friends were careful, they could go everywhere.

He even knew how they could leave the castle. Nell and Diamond had told him and on his explorations he had found some secret passages as well. The way he had in mind was deep down, near to the dungeons and had many advantages. It was unlikely that someone would see them and the exit ended in a forest which didn't belong to the castle anymore. The greatest advantage however was that they even didn't have to pass the wards which protected the castle since the way was below them. Harry smiled.

Yes, they would do it. He had enough of staying in the castle and besides it was boring to see every day the same. They could go to Diagon Alley or somewhere else. They only had to await the right opportunity, when nobody would notice their disappearance. Harry knew that it would be very likely dangerous. But somehow it didn't

bother him. It gave him an exciting feeling. Soon they would go searching for adventures.

Chapter 13

June 1988

It was shortly after sunrise as Alison gave birth to a little girl. Admiringly she looked at her new-born daughter. She had beautiful blue eyes and curly black hair. Alison thought that her baby was the prettiest who ever had been born. The last hours had been painful but in that moment when Poppy had handed her the child, all agony had been completely forgotten, such happiness she had suddenly felt. Alison breathed Lizzie – after endless pondering Alison and Severus had agreed on the name Elizabeth but since she found the name too long she decided there and then to call her daughter Lizzie – a kiss onto the tiny nose and carefully leaned back into her pillows. Holding her child in her arms, she had to think of her parents and tears welled up in her eyes.

How much she wished that her parents would have been able to live to see Lizzie's birth. A faint noise caused her to look to the door. Severus stepped with rigid expression on his face into the room and Alison sighed. How great it could have been if they weren't forced to keep her marriage a secret.

Then Severus wouldn't have had to sneak into the hospital wing like a thief, always careful that no-one discovered their secret. The last months she had already feared that it wouldn't take long anymore until someone would find out that Severus and she were a couple. As soon as it had become obvious that she expected a child she had given rise to wild speculations. Especially her students had been curious and she had not only had the feeling one time that she was spied on. Additionally to the daily stress it had become too much for her some day so that she hadn't taught anymore since April and she missed it greatly but she hadn't been able to do it. Severus sat carefully down on the bed and as his eyes fell on the little bundle that rested in Alison's arms, he held his breath.

"She has exactly your colour of hair. Here, take her."

She gave the baby to him and almost had to laugh, when seeing how he held his daughter and his expression was really priceless.

He held her so cautiously that you could think he was holding a highly explosive thing in his arms.

“My daughter.” He said this in a voice that sounded like he couldn’t belief it.

Alison laughed softly. It seemed that men behaved always a bit strange when they became a father.

Two weeks ago Charlotte had given birth to a boy and Sirius had danced through Hogwarts the whole day. Exhausted and happy she looked at her husband and her new-born daughter, who sleepily blinked at her parents.

A few hours later Hermione came to the conclusion that Lizzie, though she was sweet, Jamie was much cuter. Jamie, who was currently in Charlotte’s arms, screwed up his nose and Hermione had to laugh as the baby’s face looked completely crumpled for a moment but since she got the impression that the visit was taking too long already and she was totally superfluous anyway, she waited for a lull in the conversation and asked Charlotte, if she could go to the Quidditch field, where she expected her friends. After she had said goodbye to Alison Lennox, she stepped out into the corridor.

As she had gone upstairs, she gazed at the branching off corridors and hesitated. Although she had been living in Hogwarts for several months already, it caused her still problems to find her way around in the huge rambling castle. That Hermione had been adopted from Sirius and Charlotte had been a stroke of luck for the little orphan. The new world, in which she had been put so abruptly, had been enough exciting to distract her to some extent so that she had hardly an opportunity to think of the events which had left her alone during the day. At nights however she wept bitterly, experienced in nightmares the last moments of her parents and missed them desperately while clinging to Charlotte and sometime falling asleep in her comforting hug.

Hermione, who had finally found the right way, stepped outside and set off to the Quidditch field to meet her friends, where they certainly were playing Quidditch.

In the first days which she had spent in Hogwarts, she had behaved rather coolly but Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom and above all Ron's sister Ginny, who was a year younger than they, hadn't given up. So that Hermione had made friend with them in the end and ever since they roamed through Hogwarts or played Quidditch, while Charlie, Ron's older brother was watching and looking after them.

At Quidditch she had also realized that she was a witch. It had been totally unintentional but she had said 'up' to a broom and he had jumped into her hand. She didn't even know why she had done it, perhaps because she had been sad that she hadn't been able to join in. Even Ginny – after Charlie had taught her to fly two months ago – had been able to fly. Only she had been left on the ground. It had been a great shock for her to discover this.

She had felt guilty of being a witch while her parents had been killed by wizards. Charlotte had comforted her and assured her that she did not have to feel guilty but nonetheless the feeling of guilt never left her, no more than the hate which filled her, whenever she thought of her parents and their murderers. When her waving friends came into view, she smiled and suppressed the memories which seemed to haunt her mercilessly.

It was early in the afternoon as Harry, Caro and Draco tried to sneak out of the castle. There was again an important Death Eater meeting – only for the Inner Circle – so that they could assume that they wouldn't be missed from anyone in the next few hours and therefore no-one would look for them.

They intended to go to Diagon Alley or better said they wanted to fly. Since they weren't able to apparate yet, flying would be the easiest and fastest way for them. As soon as Harry had told his friends about his plan, they had been enthusiastic and as well had been hardly able to wait until a good opportunity would finally arise.

The dungeons they fortunately reached without any difficulties and after walking about a quarter of an hour through a cramped and long corridor, they squeezed themselves through a narrow cleft, who

stretched a deep crack through the old walls and entered the forest. There they got on their brooms and rose into the air.

In the large library of the castle Harry had found a map of Great Britain. Arreton's castle however hadn't been recorded on it so that Draco and Caro had had to discover the approximate direction in which Diagon Alley was situated through careful questions. Both had succeeded to get the information without arousing their parents' suspicion and so they finally reached Dagon Alley without any problems.

They got off their brooms and began to walk along the street. Apart from them there were only a few people on the way. Nearly all cast strange and curious glances at them. To see three children walking alone through Diagon Alley was not exactly a daily sight, at least in those times.

While Draco and Caro were looking inside the various shops, Harry slowly realized how dangerous their adventure could get. What, if they would be caught by the Order of the Phoenix?

Although he would be able to defend himself, he wouldn't have a chance against a whole bunch of grown-up wizards and Draco and Caro could do a lot less than him. But now it was too late to rack his brain over what could happen. Harry began also to look around and soon he had forgotten his fears, so much he was preoccupied with regarding the many interesting things in the windows. Caro, who had come to a halt, pointed to a small window, where a tiny snowy owl was sitting in a cage and asked,

"Look at that owl, isn't she sweet?"

Draco rolled his eyes, tore himself away from the sight of a racing broom and went back to Caro:

"You can buy her," he suggested.

"I haven't so much money with me. It would only be enough for an ice cream. We could go to Florian Fortescue and eat ice cream there. My Dad told me once that the best ice cream in the world is sold there."

“Good idea,” Harry said. In the meantime he had begun to feel rather hot, so that he had no objections against a little cooling. Draco agreed too and so they sauntered to the ice-cream parlour which they found relatively easy while their eyes swept past the windows.

“Hopefully Fortescue has actually open,” Caro muttered as she saw the deserted little tables which were standing in front of the ice-cream parlour.

“Let’s go and see,” Harry said

To their great delight Florean Fortescue was really there. The small man turned out to be extremely friendly and sold them wonderful large sundaes.

“Where are your parents? You shouldn’t wander around alone in Diagon Alley. It is too dangerous. You never know when those damned Death Eaters attack again,” He said with a worried expression while looking around as if he would expect an attack any second.

Harry realized that the man probably would not be so friendly to them anymore, would he know who they really were. For Harry it was the first time that he met someone who wasn’t a follower of his father, apart from the old wizard who had sold him his wand. Harry however didn’t think that Florean Fortescue was bad and evil, like he actually should be after his father’s expositions, on the contrary he found him rather nice.

“Our parents will fetch us soon,” Harry answered and smiled reassuringly at him while licking his chocolate ice cream.

In the meantime Caro and Draco looked at him, like he had lost his mind. The owner of the ice-cream parlour nodded and asked for their names.

“Those are Caro and Draco and I’m Harry.”

“Nice to meet you. In the last time, it was rather lonely here. Ever since the war has started only a few have come to me. But it’s

understandable, isn't it? Who does want to eat sundaes, when there is war?" he asked, looked sadly at them and sighed deeply.

"The ice-cream is just wonderful, by the way. The best ice-cream I've ever eaten. My Dad was right," Caro tried to cheer him up. A beaming smile appeared on Florean's face.

"Really? Thank you. Who's your father? Do I know him?"

Harry, Draco and Caro looked at each other.

"I don't think so," Caro said hesitatingly.

Florean Fortescue just wanted to reply something as a deafening explosion caused them all to flinch in fright. Draco nearly fell from his chair and Harry choked on his ice-cream while trying to reach for his wand at the same time.

"An attack! Quick, run away!" Florean screamed, spun around and disappeared inside of his little house.

Caro dropped her spoon in the cup with a rattling face.

"I think we should as well better disappear," she said. Her face was white.

From afar loud screams rang out, as they ran however fast they could into the opposite direction. Several corners further they heavily leaned against the wall of a house.

"I think it would be best to return," Harry uttered with difficulty. Caro and Draco only nodded. Flying high up in the air Harry looked down. But apart from smoke he couldn't see anything. For a while they were silent. Then Draco remarked,

"The ice-cream was a lot better than the one I eat at home."

"It's too bad that we couldn't eat it up. Why of all days did they have to fight today?" Harry asked while flying a swerve.

“The worthless Muggles and those wizards who aren’t on our side have to be killed, that’s why,” Draco said.

Harry remained silent. That was exactly the same what his father always said. But was it right? Florean Fortescue had been friendly and nice and not at all mean or terrible. He didn’t know it. He would think about it sometime. Caro interrupted his thoughts.

“We really have to go to Diagon Alley again. I want to buy that owl. She was so sweet.”

Harry smiled.

“The moment a good opportunity will arise again, Caro.” Harry said and in high-spirits he flew a loop. As he had overcome his fright by the explosion, he even found it exciting. It had been an adventure. Shortly afterwards they manoeuvred their brooms through the trees and landed into the forest. Hardly had Harry put his feet on the ground as he felt how a horrible coldness surrounded him. He had only just time to see a Dementor appearing in front of him; then he fell. He seemed to float and suddenly he saw a young woman with dark red long hair. She was beautiful and had emerald eyes. She shouted something while her eyes were despairingly looking at someone, he couldn’t see. A voice, which seemed to come from a great distance, rang out.

“Not Harry! Please, not Harry!”

The coldness decreased and he heard other voices; first indistinctly, then louder.

“Harry! Wake up!”

“Harry!”

Slowly he opened his eyes and stared in the worried faces of Caro and Draco, who bent over him. Looking around he realized that he was lying on the ground in the secret passage way.

“For Heaven’s sake, are you all right, Harry? You gave us quite a fright. What the devil did the Dementor do there?” Caro asked wavering.

“I don’t know. What happened?” Harry’s voice trembled.

“The Dementor came and you fainted. Since we didn’t know exactly how to fight that thing, we dragged you into the corridor. We thought it would be best to disappear as soon as possible. You are pretty heavy, do you know this? Terrible beasts. I’m totally cold,” Draco replied and shuddered.

Harry nodded and stood up. He felt very sick.

“Your face’s ashen. Come, we bring you back to your rooms,” Caro said.

She wanted to take his arm but immediately shrank back, when noticing Diamond who had stuck her head out of his sleeve.

“She won’t bite me, will she?” Caro asked.

Harry shook his head, not capable of doing more. Caro looked at him doubtfully. Then she took his arm and supported him. Harry felt dizzy but with Caro’s and Draco’s help he finally managed to get back to his rooms. Arriving there they sank exhausted into the soft armchairs. Harry was glad about being able to sit down.

“What a day!” Caro said while running a hand over her forehead.

“Yes, but it was great, wasn’t it? Except for meeting the Dementor. I really could have done without this.

What was he doing in the forest, anyway? I thought the Dementors guard the castle. So what did he want there?” Draco asked with raised eyebrows.

“Perhaps he got lost,” Caro suggested.

A knocking interrupted them and a moment later Bellatrix Lestrange appeared in the door.

“Forgive me the interruption, My Lord. Carolina, come, we’re going home and Draco, your parents await you as well.”

They said goodbye and shortly afterwards Harry was alone. Strangely enough he felt relief that his friends had gone. But he wanted to think about what had happen in peace.

Who had been this woman? Had it been his mother? Certainly. She had had nearly the same eye colour as him. Harry leaned back into his armchair, drew his knees up and slid his arms around them. He was still cold but he didn’t feel so sick anymore like earlier on.

Since he had been six years old and Caro had asked him for his mother, he had been thinking about her and had wondered what had happened to her. He didn’t even know her name. In connection with his mum there was a secret, he was sure of it. A secret he didn’t know. Harry had also never seen any pictures of her in the castle. His father had never mentioned his mum or had spoken about her and Harry had never asked him for her. Why not, by the way? Harry could not name the reason exactly but somehow he had never really dared to ask. He had been afraid of his father’s reaction.

“I’ve brought you something to eat, My Lord.”

Harry started in his chair. He hadn’t noticed at all that Nell had entered the room.

“Thank you, Nell.”

While he was eating absent-mindedly, suddenly an idea occurred to him. Looking at Nell, he asked,

“Nell, tell me, what it was like, when I was born.”

The house-elf stared at him and then she told him something that he hadn’t expected at all. It did not answer his questions at all; on the contrary, now he had a lot more. So his father had brought him to Nell one day. Where he had been before or who his mother was, Nell didn’t know as well. Had his father taken him away from his mother? Harry didn’t know what to think. Suddenly he decided that he would ask his father. He wanted to know the truth. Standing up, he stepped

out of his room. After he had gone along two dark corridors, he finally reached his father's study. Taking a deep breath he knocked and stepped in. His father, who sat at his desk, looked up.

"Sorry, that I disturb you, father. But I wanted to ask ...I wanted to ask what has happened

with my mum," The words came gushing out before he lost his courage.

His father cast a sharp and piercing glance at him.

"She died at your birth. Now go back to your room. I've soon an important meeting."

"But what was her name?" Harry tried again.

"Didn't you hear me, Harry?" Now his tone was dangerously low.

Harry nodded,

"Yes, sorry. Good night."

He turned and left the room while his thoughts spun around in his head. Why had his father lied to him? It didn't match with what Nell had told him and what he had seen as he had met the Dementor.

Reaching again his room he sank into his comfortable armchair and thought about it. Had his father really kidnapped him? Was his mother perhaps still alive? Despairingly sighing he wondered how on earth he could find out the truth. While Harry was staring at the opposite wall without seeing it and hanging onto his thoughts, Rainbow came flying to him. His phoenix started to sing softly. Harry raised his hand and began to stroke her over the soft feathers. It was getting late and sometime Harry fell asleep in his armchair.

He dreamt from the red haired woman and a Dementor, who chased after him and wanted to suck his soul out.

After Harry had left his study, the Dark Lord riveted his eyes on the door. Why was the boy so suddenly interested in his mother? He didn't intend however to tell Harry ever the truth about his background.

Harry would never find out that he was a Potter. Leaning back Voldemort thought of Harry having soon his eighth birthday. Slowly it was time that he would learn the Unforgivable Curses, especially the Imperius Curse.

As his heir Harry had to be able to fight against the Curse any time. The other two curses were of course important as well.

In future he would devote more time for the lessons. Smiling the Dark Lord reached for his cup of tea. Currently everything was going like he wanted and contented he took a sip of his hot tea.

The years, since he had killed the Potters and had taken their son with him, had been very successful. Now he only had to destroy those annoying resistance groups, then he really would be the most powerful wizard in the world. Above all the Order of the Phoenix which thwarted his plans over and over again to his boundless anger must be eliminated. Why he hadn't managed it so far was a complete mystery to him. The reason for this, he thought, was probably this old fool Dumbledore.

If the Order lost his leader, it likely wouldn't be such a huge problem anymore to destroy the Order. Somehow he had to get rid of him. The question was only how he should do this? He would think about it as soon as he would have time. The Dark Lord stood up and set off to the great hall of the castle, where he would shortly hold a meeting for all his followers.

Chapter 14

January 1989

The raven-haired boy was sitting on the window seat and was currently watching the slowly falling snowflakes. The park looked beautiful and was totally covered in white. While he was admiring the view Harry sighed. The last months had been terrible. A few weeks after they had gone on their trip to Diagon Alley Caro's father had been killed by Aurors. Though Harry hadn't any idea what exactly had happened, he knew that Mr. Lestrangle had been just torturing a Muggle family together with some other Death Eaters.

Unfortunately they had been attacked by Aurors and members of the Order of the Phoenix. For the family however it had been a rescue at the last minute. In the fierce fight, which followed straight afterwards, Mr. Lestrangle had been hit with the Killing Curse. Caro had been inexpressibly sad and inconsolable.

Harry and Draco had done all in their power to help Caro but despite their efforts it had taken long until Caro, who had loved her father very deeply, had smiled again. The sorrow in her grey eyes however had never disappeared completely. Never in his life had Harry felt so useless, as Caro had wept over her father in his and Draco's arms, since she hadn't been allowed to mourn at home.

The behaviour of Caro's mother had enraged Harry. Neither had she comforted her daughter nor had she shown with some gesture that she regretted the loss of her husband. Since he had seen how much Bella's indifference had hurt Caro, Harry harboured a dislike against his teacher. She is cold, Harry thought, and wondered if Bella had any feelings at all.

He had also never seen her laughing. Although he had never met Mr Lestrangle, he assumed that he hadn't had a great similarity with his wife; at least he concluded this from everything that Caro had told them about her father. How much he wished to be able to help Caro. Pressing his face against the icy windowpane, he sadly sniffed. That had been the one thing that had happened. The other had happened shortly after his eighth birthday - he hadn't celebrated because of Caro's mourning.

Anyway his father had come to him and had told him that it was time for him to learn the Unforgivable Curses and as soon as he would be able to control them, he would attend the Death Eater meetings. He was finally old enough after all and slowly he had to learn how to behave as the heir of the Dark Lord. So his father had begun to teach him the Imperius Curse. Harry however had had extreme difficulties to throw the curse off right from the start and had not even managed to break the curse a single time so far. He had read a lot about the Unforgivable Curses and he knew very well that it wasn't such a surprise that he wasn't capable of doing this. These curses were highly advanced and very powerful magic and he was only eight years old after all.

Though he hadn't expressed his opinion to his father, he was secretly convinced that it wasn't his fault.

He had also reckoned with his father's impatience and anger. He knew that his father didn't like it if anyone didn't make any progress over the weeks. The quickly increasing annoyance of his father had led to it that his father had visited him every day to practise with him and on top of that he and his friends had got additional lessons from Bella, Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy.

As Harry had once dared to complain to his father that they learned too much and that they didn't have any free time anymore, he had realized why his father was feared by so many. For one instant he had thought that his father would hit him. But his father had informed him in an icy tone that they weren't little children anymore and that they slowly had to learn what it meant to be an adult. Therefore they didn't need so much free time. Since then Harry hadn't dared to oppose again. The only bright spot on the horizon was that he had nearly managed to break the Imperious Curse yesterday, but only almost. Soon his father would come again to practice this damned curse with him. Slowly he really began to hate this spell.

Harry sighed. He wanted to love his father, he however made it difficult for him. He was always so cold and unapproachable. Never had he hugged him and in the last months he had only wanted that he would finally break this curse. Everything else hadn't been important for him. Even as Caro's father had been killed, it hadn't

mattered to him at all. Harry who hadn't been able to cope with the situation to comfort his friend had wanted a bit consolation himself but his father had only said that it had been destiny and with that the topic had been done for him.

Watching a snowflake, he thought of his mother. Would she have reacted exactly the same way or would she have comforted him and hugged him? During the last months he had often thought of her. The secret however he still hadn't solved. He just hadn't had the time for it. But what was even more serious: he didn't know at all where to search and how he could find out the truth. Although he had thought about it back and forth, a fairly useful starting point had never occurred to him. Perhaps he should ask his friends for advice. He had never told them what he had seen in the presence of the Dementor.

Somehow it had never been the right opportunity for doing so and during the time when Caro had been completely devastated because of her father's death, he hadn't wanted to bother her with this. Thinking of Caro, hatred for the Aurors rose in him again. Shortly afterwards he remembered the Muggle family. In the last time he had often thought about it, whether it was just to kill the Muggles or wrong and evil and whether his father was really right. But never could he force himself to come to a decision. He just didn't know what was right and neither could he speak with his father about his doubts.

Once more his thoughts wandered back to his unknown mother and again he felt this painful yearning. Since he had met that Dementor he had often had nightmares which had been about his mother and this awful creature.

It really made him angry if he thought that he had not even been able to solve the secret a bit in seven months. But where should he look for it? He was sure of it that he wouldn't find any answers for his questions in this castle. So where? Harry stifled a curse and suddenly jumped off the window seat. Pacing back and forth in the dimly-lit room, which was illuminated only from the glow of the flickering fire, he angrily ground his teeth. He *must* think up an idea! While the snow was still falling, he sat down in his armchair and brooded. Soon his father would come and practise that blasted curse with him and he absolutely didn't feel like doing this.

Emily Lupin had hardly made herself comfortable in her armchair and had picked up her book as the loud crying of the two babies rang out who actually should be sleeping in the cradle but obviously they didn't have this in mind. As Emily carefully took the little ones out of their cradle, the crying stopped, as she had expected it. Casting a glance at her watch, she saw that it was time anyway for their bottles and so she was sitting on the settee a few minutes later and was feeding her little charges.

Sometimes it was really strenuous to take care of them. But despite the trouble they caused every time it was Emily's turn to watch them, she loved the little ones with all her heart. She couldn't be angry with them for long anyway. While giving the children the bottle, she looked at the two. Jamie looked nearly the same as Sirius. The similarity was really amazing. Only the dark brown hair he had inherited from her sister. Otherwise he had Sirius's sparkling blue eyes. Lizzie had also blue eyes but hers were brighter than Jamie's and she had lovely black curls.

Since the children had been born they were taking turns as babysitter while the others were then either teaching or attending the meetings of the Order of the Phoenix. So no-one of them missed too much. While the women were utterly satisfied with the arrangement their husbands hadn't been exactly happy about their agreement.

Especially Sirius and Severus had fought against it. Both loathed it to see how their children played together.

As she thought of this Emily amused shook her head. Sometimes they really behaved rather ridiculous. It was so much easier when only one of them looked after the children and not always both mothers. Apart from this Charlotte and Alison could thus recover from her duties as well for some time and could devote their time to other things. Soon there would be a third child since she was finally pregnant as well. It was however still her secret. So far she hadn't told anyone. Suddenly the door flung open and Hermione stormed in with flushed cheeks,

"Oh, excuse me, Emily. I only wanted to fetch Jamie."

“Has the meeting of the Order finished already?”

“Yes, today they didn’t take so long and Charlotte said that Alison would come soon as well.”

“Here, but be careful,” Emily said and handed the baby along with the bottle to Hermione.

“Of course. I’m always careful. I would never allow that something happened to Jamie. He is my little brother after all.”

After saying this she said goodbye and left the room. Emily nodded contented. It was nice to see that Hermione wasn’t so sad anymore as she had been at the beginning when Sirius and Charlotte had adopted her. The girl had got used well to the life in Hogwarts. To give Hermione a home was the very least thing they could do after they had failed to save her parents from the Death Eaters. Emily shuddered as she thought back to the many battles she had been present at. They all had had so indescribable luck. No-one of them had been killed so far. But how long would it remain so? She cuddled Lizzie closer to her and began to tell her little darling a story. She did not want to think about those terrible things any more.

“No, no! You don’t concentrate enough! You nearly did it but then you failed again! You will try it once more!”

Harry cringed at the angry shouting. He was so tired and exhausted and his father had cursed him already five times with the Imperius Curse. Why didn’t he manage to break that curse? It couldn’t be so difficult, could it? He would do it now and throw the curse off. A half year was enough. He had absolutely no intention to have to grapple with that curse for the next months as well. With a now determined expression he nodded,

“I’m ready.”

“Imperio!” his father said peremptorily.

Again Harry heard the echoing, forcing voice of his father in his head which ordered him to climb onto the table. He did a few steps and just

wanted to climb up the table when he came to a halt and fought against the curse. This time he fought with all his might. Miraculously his father's voice became quieter and finally he managed to break the curse, shortly afterwards however he sank totally exhausted to the ground.

"About time too. But it took you far too long to throw my curse off. We'll try it tomorrow again. Perhaps you'll be more successful then," his father said in a coolly voice and left the room.

Harry, who was still lying on the ground, felt hot tears burning in his eyes. Quickly he suppressed them. He wouldn't cry. No. He was too old for this. Suddenly he was distracted by an angry hiss as his snake, who had been nearly crushed, slid off his arm and as quick as lightning disappeared under an armchair. While gazing after Diamond, he slowly began to seethe with rage, too.

Now he finally had managed it and had broken the curse and his father was still not satisfied because he hadn't been quick enough! A wave of anger rushed over him. Furious and hurt he banged his fist on the ground and in the same moment a loud rattling noise was heard and an icy draught hit his flushed face. When he looked up he saw that the glass of the windows had been broken into tiny glittering pieces. Bewildered Harry stared at the broken windows. How had he done this? With a wave of his wand he repaired the damage; then he stood up and collapsed tiredly into one of his armchairs.

Was it possible to perform magic without a wand? Obviously he had just done exactly this. Even if it had been unintentional, maybe you could control it. If it was possible to do magic without using a wand, it would be a great advantage for him and he had to learn it by all means. Harry yawned. How tired he was. It had cost him a lot of his strength to break the Imperius Curse. He would think about it some other time. Harry stood up, staggered in his bed and fell immediately asleep. In this night he dreamed again about his mother.

"You have seen your mother?"

"Don't be so loud, Draco!"

Harry, who had woken up from another nightmare in the middle of the night, where a Dementor had hunted his mother and him, had finally decided to tell his friends what he had seen in the Dementor's presence. When he had told them everything they unbelievably gaped at him.

"I want to find out the truth but so far no idea has occurred to me yet, how I should do this."

"Why haven't you told us earlier?" Draco asked, who still looked a bit surprised..

"I don't know. But somehow there was never the right time for it."

For some minutes they sat silently together while every one of them hung onto their own thoughts. Then Caro raised her head and said,

"We know that it happened 1981. Nell has told us this, right?"

Harry looked at her questioningly:

"Yes. But how should that help us?"

"Let us suggest that you really were kidnapped. I'm sure that the Daily Prophet would have had written about such an event. So we only have to go to the newspaper and have to search for newspapers from 1981 in the archives of the Daily Prophet."

"That would be a brilliant idea, Caro. At least, if the Daily Prophet wouldn't be controlled by my father and his Death Eaters and... I hardly think that he would be very keen of it if he found out that I'm searching for my mum. Whatever we'll do, no- one can discover it. You can't tell anyone else."

"Of course not, Harry. But I think Caro's right. If we shouldn't find anything in the newspapers, then where do you want to look for the truth, Harry? I don't think that my parents know something about your mother. That would be rather unlikely. They didn't even know that you existed. So it would be our only chance. We could try to sneak in there and if we should find something, we could try to steal the right

newspaper. Perhaps we could charm us invisible. In any case it would be an adventure once again.”

“Yes, this could work perhaps. First we’ll have to learn however the Invisible Spell, but we won’t ask anyone. That would be too conspicuous. We’ll have to find out this on our own. Then we’ll wait for a good opportunity. This time we have to be particularly careful. If the Death Eaters catch us, it would be difficult to explain what we wanted in the archives of the Daily Prophet,” Harry said with a thoughtful expression on his face.

“Okay, we’ll do it. As soon as we’re able to charm us invisible, we will go.”

Chapter 15

May 1989

It was a beautiful warm day as Harry, Caro and Draco flew through the air on their fast brooms. It had lasted over four months until they finally had managed to charm themselves invisible. Since they had come up with their plan they had been training. Harry had managed it first but after secret training hours the others had succeeded as well. While they were flying Harry and Draco enjoyed throwing a little ball to each other. In the meantime Caro tried to guess where her friends currently were. Since she had absolutely no desire to crash together with her friends, she attempted to fly highly above them. Fortunately they reached their destination without any accidents.

After they had got off their brooms they shrunk them and put them into their pockets. Then they carefully and holding hands – so as not to lose each other – set off to the place where the Daily Prophet was designed every day and where the newspaper had also its archives. After they had managed to avoid crashing together with a few oncoming people they stood shortly afterwards in front of a tall building. It was painted with a dark blue colour and made an imposing impression. About a dozen Death Eaters were standing in front of the large doors and were guarding the entrance.

“What do we do now?” Draco whispered.

“We’ve to wait until someone will go in or out, then we’ll try to sneak in,” Harry mumbled back.

A few minutes nothing happened and they stood closely by each other while staring attentively at the doors.

“There, the man is going inside!” Caro whispered excitedly.

Quickly they rushed to the entrance and slid carefully past the wizard. Then they entered the building. There they found themselves in a huge hall which shone in a bright light due to various large chandeliers.

“And now? Does anyone have an idea where we have to go?” Harry asked while looking curiously around.

“Over there is an information board. There should be written where the archives are,” Caro said and pointed to a labelled board which was floating in the air.

After they had thoroughly studied the information board they knew the approximate way. They went a long curved staircase up until they reached the third floor, then they hurried several narrow corridors along, got four times lost and nearly crashed into a dozen of different people. But finally they managed to arrive at their destination.

“Goodness, I’m totally exhausted!”

“Draco, really. Stop making such a fuss. That wasn’t so bad. I’ve thought that it would be a lot more difficult to get in here. But there aren’t so many guards standing around here like I’ve expected. And we’ve found it, haven’t we?” Caro replied.

“Be quiet! Or do you want getting caught?” Harry whispered with a nervous expression on his face while just wanting to open the door.

“The door is locked.”

After he had looked around and had made sure that they were really alone in the corridor, he whispered,

“Alohomora!”

There was a soft click and the door opened. Quickly they darted inside. There they were faced with at least hundred bookshelves which reached from the ground to the ceiling and which contained countless thick large files.

“Well. We only need the year of 1981. That shouldn’t be so difficult,” Caro whispered, after a short stunned silence.

They went along the many rows until they finally found the right year. Since every file was labelled it had been rather easy to find the right one.

Harry, who could hardly wait, tried to fetch the heavy file down but Harry couldn't hold it and let go off it. He hadn't expected that it would be so heavy. As the file hit the ground with a loud thud they stood completely frozen for a moment. But it seemed so that no- one had heard them. They heaved a sigh of relief and bent down simultaneously to pick the file up. Promptly they crashed together.

"Ah, that was my head!"

"Mine, too, Draco!" Harry said a bit annoyed while running his hand over his forehead.

"I think we can charm us visible again. It should be safe here. I hardly believe that someone will come in here,"

Caro suggested who had knocked against a bookshelf.

After they had charmed themselves visible again they managed together to carry the bulky file to a little desk which was standing in a corner.

They bent forward and Harry began to leaf slowly through the sides of parchment.

"Harry, it did happen in October, didn't it? So why are you searching in March?" Caro asked impatiently.

Harry cast an annoyed glance at her and turned the pages to October. But there they didn't find anything that looked interesting in the slightest. Deeply disappointed he turned the page over. His eyes fell on a large picture and surprised and startled he held his breath. The picture showed two people who held a little baby in their arms. The raven- haired man he had never seen before but the woman next to him he recognized immediately. He had found his mother. The three friends bent their heads lower and read the tragic events which had happened on 31st October.1981 in Godric's Hollow.

"Harry, look! The man on the picture has the same untidy hair as you! He also looks like he has never combed his hair before," Draco exclaimed astonished.

Harry who was staring spellbound at the article and the pictures felt slightly dizzy. His feelings were in a chaotic turmoil. *Was his name Harry Potter and not Harry Riddle?* Were the Potters his real parents? And his father was not his father? Harry couldn't think straight anymore.

Caro laid gently a hand on his arm.

"Are you alright, Harry?" she asked worriedly while regarding his ashen face.

Harry was totally frozen. Without noticing he whispered nearly inaudible,

"They were my parents."

He knew that it had been naïve but deep down in his heart he had hoped that his mum was still alive. In his dreams he had longed to be held by her arms while she tightly hugged him and softly sung to him. Now he realized how naïve it had been to believe this. It wasn't only that but now all things fitted together. Now he knew what had happened at that time. The Dark Lord had gone to Godric's Hollow and had killed his parents while he as a baby had witnessed the crime. Then the Dark Lord had taken him along and had brought him to Nell. Harry couldn't believe it. He felt sick and he was ice-cold. He felt dreadful. The terrible truth had shaken him and had hit him hard; the truth that his father had killed his real parents. Whatever he had hoped and thought before what had happened then, never he had imagined that the truth would look like that. But why hadn't the Dark Lord killed him as well?

"What?" Draco asked and thus interrupted Harry's thoughts.

In Draco's face utter confusion was written.

"The Potters were Harry's parents! Really Draco! Don't you understand anything?" Caro replied sharply.

Draco's face showed now disbelief, bewilderment and shock.

"I'm friends with a Potter?"

“Yes obviously! Unless you want to betray him now! You’re really a...”

It seemed so that Caro was so angry that she didn’t know exactly how to call him, thus she confined herself to casting only a furious glance at him. Looking at Harry she said in a soft voice,

“Harry, we have to go! We’ve been away too long already. Come, Harry.”

After saying this she resolutely took Harry’s arm and charmed herself invisible. Harry, who looked rather battered, did it as well but without noticing it really. Then Caro led him out of the archives.

Draco followed them quickly. Luckily they managed to leave the building without any complications. The way back proceeded in depressed silence. While they were flying through the still warm air Draco was thinking.

Harry was his best friend and he liked him very much. But now he had discovered that his best friend was a Potter. As long as Draco could remember his parents had told him stories about their enemies, about Dumbledore, the Order and of course about the Potters; James and Lily Potter who had been worshipped as heroes for their bravery in the war, at least from all wizards who fought against the Dark Side. When they had been killed many had mourned. Since their death the Potters had become icons for the resistance. His father had drummed into his head that James Potter had been a traitor due to his decision to fight against the Dark Side. And now his best friend was a Potter? His parents had taught him to hate those. He shook his head. But Harry had been raised as a Riddle and not as a Potter. So Harry was still the heir of the Dark Lord and he still was Harry’s friend, wasn’t he?

After they had landed in the forest they carefully sneaked into the castle through the secret passage and returned to Harry’s chambers.

As soon as they stepped into his room, they saw Nell, who awaited them with tea and little delicious looking sandwiches. Harry shut the door and turned himself visible again. Draco, who had gone immediately to an armchair and had just wanted to bite in his ham

sandwich, suddenly realized that he still was invisible. So he quickly said the counter curse.

“You will swear that you won’t tell a soul what we’ve discovered today.”

Since Harry’s voice had sounded so odd, Draco raised his head and nearly choked on his sandwich. Harry stood in front of the door and looked at them. His emerald eyes looked almost black. For an imperceptible moment Draco had the feeling to see this strange uncanny golden aura again which Draco had believed seeing two years ago.

“Of course, Harry. I won’t tell anyone. I swear,” Caro said immediately.

“I won’t tell either, Harry. I swear it,” Draco followed.

Harry nodded and went to the window, totally ignoring the delicious sandwiches.

Caro, who had just taken a sip from her hot tea, turned her head to the window, where Harry was standing.

“Harry, don’t you want to eat something?”

“No.” His tone was strangely flat.

Caro sighed and put her cup on the table, stood up and stepped to Harry.

“Harry, I’m so sorry. I can imagine what you feel right now, at least I think it. When my Dad was killed I believed as well that I would never be happy again. I felt so angry, so helpless and so unhappy and my mother seemed to be not affected in the slightest. It was the worst feeling I ever had and I will never forget it. Without you I wouldn’t have got through this. You have to feel similar right now, don’t you? Anyway what I wanted to say, Harry, is that whatever happens, we are there for you. We will always help you.”

Harry turned around and for a short moment he stared at Caro. Then he began to sob and pulled his friend close to himself. Caro put her

arms around Harry and held him tightly while Harry was crying silently. In the meantime Draco, who was staring somewhere thoughtfully, ate the sandwiches up.

After a while Harry let go off Caro and said,

“I’ll go to Godric’s Hollow.”

“Godric’s Hollow? But Harry, what do you only want there?”

“I don’t know, Caro. But I’ll go there. ”

The next morning Harry got out from his bed and felt totally tired and exhausted. He had hardly slept the previous night. Nearly the whole time he had tossed from one side to the other. He had thought only about his parents and the pictures he had seen in the Daily Prophet. In the middle of the night he had realized another thing.

His parents had fought against the Dark Lord. That meant that his parents belonged to the people he should hate, at least according to what his father had taught him or better said the murderer of his real parents or his adopted father? Harry sighed. He absolutely didn’t know what to believe anymore, what was right and what wasn’t. Over night his world had shattered into pieces. He felt so hurt, so angry.

When sitting listlessly in front of his breakfast he thought how he should now behave in presence of his father. How could he face him ever again? Had his real parents been right to fight against the Dark Lord or had his adoptive father been right to kill them? Should he hate his adoptive father now? Had he actually ever loved him?

Though the Dark Lord had been always cold and hard towards him, he had taught him so much, he had given him a home. What should he do now? His thoughts, his feelings were still in an utter turmoil. Everything was just too much. That was the only thing he knew for certain. Almost he wished that he had never found out the truth.

Suddenly he heard a beautiful singing. Harry lifted his head and saw Rainbow sitting on the window ledge. His phoenix had returned from wherever she had been.

Rainbow flew to him and landed on the table. Then she lifted her head and looked at him for a while,

“You’re sad, Harry. Can I help you?” she asked singing.

“I don’t think so, Rainbow. Perhaps you could sing something to me.”

While Rainbow was singing, Harry felt a bit comforted. As she flew onto the armrest he began to stroke her feathers and slowly he couldn’t keep his eyes open. Comforted and secured from the softly singing he finally fell asleep.

In the afternoon of the same day a birthday party was celebrated in Hogwarts. Jamie Black had his first birthday. Amazed the tiny brown haired boy sat in his highchair and looked with wide eyes at all the many people who had gathered around him. In front of him on the table a large chocolate cake was standing. While Jamie was trying unsuccessfully to reach with his little hands for the delicious looking cake, Albus Dumbledore, who had leaned back in his chair, was observing the events. Whoever would see this birthday party would never been able to imagine that a horrible war was raging outside of Hogwarts.

But in such happy moments you could easily forget this. His eyes wandered over the many guests, who talked lively with each other. In the meantime the Quidditch field had been occupied by the children. The old wizard laughed slightly as he saw how much fun they had. Suddenly he flinched but relaxed nearly in the same moment. Neville Longbottom and Ron Weasley had nearly crashed into each other but had managed to avoid each other in the last second.

Albus’ blue eyes wandered on and fell on Alison who was holding her daughter on her lap. The little girl, whose black curls were shining in the sun, had a certain undeniable resemblance to Severus Snape. Albus knew that it was nearly unbearable for Severus that he couldn’t show himself with his daughter in the public. Only in the presence of those who knew that he was married to Alison could he hold his daughter in his arms. Otherwise it would have been too risky.

His activity as a spy was dangerous enough after all, there it wasn't necessary that Voldemort would find out about Lizzie and Alison and especially what his family meant to Severus. Albus sighed. He admired Severus deeply for being able to cope with this. But there wasn't another way. In times of war everything had to be done, what had to be done, if you wanted or not.

"Albus? Do you want a piece of cake? Albus?"

Albus turned around and saw his Deputy Headmistress.

"Excuse me, Minerva; I just didn't listen."

"I've asked you if you would want a piece of cake," Minerva repeated while casting a slightly irritating glance at him. After Albus had received his cake he began to watch Jamie who currently was unwrapping his many presents.

Chapter 16

September 1989

Fifteen year old Charlie Weasley smiled proudly while looking at his prefect badge. Currently he was sitting in the Great Hall of Hogwarts and watching how the new first years were sorted into their houses. His brother Bill would be head boy this year. Their mother had been very happy over those news and had hugged them so tightly that their bones had nearly crushed. But due to their wish to become Aurors their marks had to be good. When they had told this their mum however, she had burst out crying. He knew very well that his mother absolutely didn't like their idea to become Aurors but nevertheless they would do it. Both had made up their minds. It was their duty to fight against the Dark Lord.

His thoughts were interrupted when he noticed that it was the twins turn to be sorted and of course the hat called Gryffindor in both cases. It wasn't exactly a surprise that his brothers had ended up there because everyone of the Weasley family had been sorted into Gryffindor so far. Charlie looked over to his parents who were sitting on a large table near to the teachers and were clapping happily while Fred and George went to the tables.

In this summer his family had finally moved as well to Hogwarts. To stay in their village had become slowly too dangerous and in the end his parents had decided to leave their house although it had nearly broken his mother's heart. But the risk had become too great and should an attack happen his family would have been hardly able to defend themselves. Here in Hogwarts they would be safe. So many years they had had tremendous luck that the Death Eaters had never attacked their little house but you shouldn't tempt fate too long.

Due to the circumstance that nearly all students were living now in Hogwarts the Hogwarts Express hadn't travelled this year. The few students who lived in hiding with their families had arrived by port-key. Charlie sighed sadly and wondered what else would still change. He regretted it that they would never sit in the train again. Only if the war would end and only then they would be able to return to their house again, Charlie thought gloomily. Not only his parents had found it

hard to leave their home. He doubted it however that the war would ever come to an end.

As long as he could remember the war had been raging, he had never known anything else. But somehow it seemed to become worse and worse. While looking up and regarding the charmed ceiling, Charlie prayed that the Dark Lord would never succeed in attacking Hogwarts. Shortly afterwards he looked down on the table and began to eat.

One week later Harry stared shocked at the ruins of Godric's Hollow. Although he had known of course that Godric's Hollow had been destroyed, he had never expected to see such chaos. It seemed so that no- one had changed something and that the place looked still the same as on Halloween 1981. The destroyed house and the now completely overgrown garden were surrounded by several huge trees and a dense hedge. Eight years ago the garden must have been beautiful but now everything grew in a total mess.

Harry felt the wards which surrounded this place but he sensed how extremely weak they were and at one spot was a huge hole. He suspected that the Dark Lord had caused this when he had come to Godric's Hollow.

"And now?" Draco asked.

"I don't know Draco. I only wanted to see it."

Harry crossed the garden and stepped nearer to the destroyed house. The area in front of him was a totally chaos. He could see broken furniture, some items he couldn't recognize, something that looked like it had been once a staircase, rather many tiles and a lot of dust and dirt. Carefully he began to wade trough this mess. His steps made crunching noises. Suddenly his gaze fell on something shiny. He went there, bent down and picked a broken photo frame up.

The glass of the frame had reflected the sunlight. He wiped the splinter of glass away and with his sleeve he tried to remove the dust. Slowly a photograph came to the surface. His parents and a little baby could be seen there. His father had put an arm around his

mother while she was holding a little bundle from where a tuft of black hair peeped out. His parents were waving at him and Harry felt tears welling up in his eyes.

“Have you found something?”

Harry flinched slightly. He hadn’t noticed that Caro had stepped beside him.

“Yes... I ... here, I found a photograph of my parents.”

Caro took it and regarded at it.

“Perhaps we should search a bit.” Then she lifted her head and looked at him

“You wanted to search for things which belonged to your parents, didn’t you? That’s why you wanted to come here.”

“I’ve nothing from them, Caro. Only the memory of my mum when I’ve seen the Dementor and the one photograph we found in the Daily Prophet but unfortunately we didn’t take the damned newspaper with us.”

“Okay, then let us look around a bit. Draco! Come, you can help us!”

So the three friends went carefully through the wrecked and destroyed house and searched for things which weren’t completely broken. Draco did this with an unwilling expression on his face while thinking how useful it would be now to have a house-elf.

After two hours they had been really successful. They had found a golden necklace with a strange black stone, a little wooden box on which cover a golden ‘P’ was surrounded by a flickering ocean of flames and a little mirror which strangely had managed to stay whole as the house had collapsed.

Furthermore they had found a leather covered photo album. Though the cover was nearly destroyed and so dusty that they found a little spider in one of the corners, the pictures were in a surprisingly good state. Harry suspected that they had been probably protected against

destruction by magic. All other things were broken, unidentified or buried so deeply under the crashed furniture and the destroyed house that they couldn't find anything else.

Draco, who had enough of that place, suggested to go quickly to Diagon Alley before they would return home since it would be a real pity not to use such an opportunity.

"Oh, yes. Perhaps the sweet owl is still there," Caro exclaimed who had always regretted that she hadn't had enough money with her to be able to buy the owl the last time.

Harry agreed, although he doubted that the owl would still be sitting in the window of the shop. So they set off to Diagon Alley. After they had climbed off their brooms they entered Diagon Alley and without any warning became involuntarily witnesses of a fight. Obviously Aurors and Death Eaters currently put up a fierce fight. Suddenly Draco screamed,

"Dad!" and ran right into the battle.

Harry cursed and followed his friend.

From one moment to the other the three friends found themselves entangled in a deadly trap.

Lucius Malfoy, who was currently fighting with the Auror Alastor Moody, nearly got a heart attack when he recognized his son.

"Draco! What the hell are you doing here?" the tall blond man shouted in a voice which promised nothing good, in case that Draco should survive the battle.

As his gaze fell on Harry his face lost all colour while cursing at the top of his voice. He knew that he had to bring the children out of the danger immediately. He absolutely didn't want to consider the consequences if the son of the Dark Lord should be killed. He would never been able to explain this to his master. The sudden appearance of the children hadn't gone unnoticed of course and had rattled not only the Aurors and the members of the Order of the

Phoenix but also the supporters of the Dark Side, so that the fight seemed to falter for a moment.

The Death Eaters looked at Lucius Malfoy as if they would expect help from him but he didn't know exactly what to do either. Before Lucius could force himself to make a decision however, movement came into the wizards who were dressed with scarlet cloaks. One of them stormed forwards, pointed his wand directly at the children and shouted,

"Petrificus Totalus!"

Harry, Caro and Draco, who stood closely next to each other, didn't waste a thought and began to defend themselves.

When one of the higher-ranking Aurors screamed,

"Bring those children to me! But don't harm them!" the situation got worse dramatically.

Harry realized that the Aurors wanted to kidnap them. Probably they wanted to save them from the Dark Side or wanted to blackmail their parents. But to think about the exact reasons it was surely not the right time now. He had his hands full to defend himself. In the meantime Lucius Malfoy, who had slightly panicked, had sent one of the Death Eaters away to fetch help and to report to the Dark Lord that three certain children, one of them his son and his two friends had suddenly appeared in the battle. Lucius knew that his lord would understand his message while his messenger would never suspect that the raven-haired boy was the heir of the Dark Lord.

Cursing the children, he warded off a curse and tried to get an overall view about the situation. If they should come through the fight unscathed, Draco would be in for it. Shaking off his dazed feeling he screamed by far too late,

"Protect the children!" and simultaneously doing everything to get near them.

How for God's sake had they managed to sneak out of the castle? While fighting he tried to keep an eye on them. Surprisingly they

fought rather well. Harry was using some spells he didn't recognize but so far they succeeded in warding off their attackers. As soon as the Aurors realized that the children defended themselves and had not at all the intention to be kidnapped by them, they had given up every consideration. Suddenly Lucius saw how Carolina was hit by a curse and sank to the ground.

"Caro!" Harry screamed.

He jumped in front of her and shouted a curse which Lucius didn't recognize once again and the Auror who had hit Bella's daughter fell to the ground as well. The Aurors meanwhile tried to separate them from the children. Lucius cursed. Why the hell didn't come any help? How long did this idiot need to inform the Dark Lord? Or had he splinched himself?

Then he saw how his son fell to his knees and held his bleeding arm. But thank goodness he was alive. Harry blocked a spell which had been meant for Draco and tried to protect his injured friends. Lucius felt how an unwilling admiration for that boy rose in him. There was no doubt that the nine year old young Lord was powerful and knew very much. For the first time Lucius could really consider this child to be the heir of his master.

Despite his lack of experience Harry was a force to be reckoned with for the Aurors. But what was much more important: he protected his two friends with a bravery Lucius hadn't expected from Harry. Lucius knew with full awareness that Harry had saved his son from a curse and was now protecting his injured son. For that he would be always grateful to Harry and Lucius knew that from now on he would respect the young Lord.

Charlotte Black couldn't believe that her colleagues were really fighting against those children and that one of them – she hadn't realized who – had even ordered them to kidnap the children. Angrily she shook her head.

She was sure that Albus would have never given such an order. It just wasn't right to be at war with children; even if they were the

children of Death Eaters. They couldn't help it after all who their parents were. They couldn't be blamed after all that they were at war.

Now she witnessed how the girl fell unconscious to the ground. Shortly afterwards the silver blond boy was hit and suddenly Charlotte was standing in front of the raven-haired boy, who as only one hadn't been injured so far. He raised his wand and then a red light was shooting straight towards her. Although she didn't like it to fight against the boy, Charlotte had no other choice in that moment than to defend herself.

While fighting with him – she reckoned he was about ten years old – she wondered who he was.

In the next moment she only thought of defending herself however. He was quick and used curses she had never seen before. Bewildered she stumbled backwards. Grimly she said to herself that she would never underestimate an opponent again. Charlotte spun around and while her heart leaped, she managed to get out of the way in the last moment. So far she had held back but now she began to fight with all her might while saying to herself that she couldn't take any consideration now that he was still a child.

After all he didn't fight like one. Suddenly a dark golden light was shooting towards her with an indescribably speed. Her quickly conjured shield was too powerless and the last thing she saw before falling to the ground were emerald eyes. While she was falling, the thought flashed into her mind that she had never seen such intense eye colour before. Then she was enveloped by darkness.

Lucius Malfoy sighed relieved. Finally a few Death Eaters had managed it to break through the rows of the fighting Aurors and had formed a protecting circle around the children. At the same moment finally more Death Eaters and even the Dark Lord himself appeared. The unexpected appearance of the Dark Lord caused a turmoil among the fighters. But with the new arrived forces the battle was decided in seconds. As soon as the Order of the Phoenix had realized that they hadn't a chance against so many Death Eaters they

apparated away as fast as they were able to while quickly trying to grab their injured, unconscious or dead colleagues.

“Harry!”

Lucius turned around and caught sight of Carolina who bent over Harry. So she had been only hit with a stunner, he thought relieved. Harry had probably woken her and had obviously fainted now. It seemed that the young Lord had used too much of his magic and energy at once. Lucius went to his son, grabbed his sleeve and yanked him up. His son was ashen in his face but except of his arm he was unhurt. The Dark Lord picked Harry up, grasped Carolina's arm and apparated away. Lucius followed with Draco while a whisper and murmur broke out among the remaining Death Eaters whose faces looked bewildered and shocked.

One hour later the Order of the Phoenix had assembled and Alastor Moody, a highly respected Auror and a member of the Order, told the other members who hadn't been present everything what had happened in the earlier fight. It was still a complete mystery wherefrom and why the children had suddenly emerged. What was most mysterious and puzzling however was that the Dark Lord himself had appeared in the battle zone, something that he had done so far only in important strategic battles. But today hadn't been an important one.

Now Albus Dumbledore, the leader of the Order, asked,

“And you don't know who the children were, Alastor?”

“The blond boy was obviously Malfoy's child. He called him ‘Dad’. Who the girl and the other boy were, I don't have any clue. But I don't think that the girl or Malfoy's son will present a problem. It is the raven-haired boy, we have to worry about. He put seven of our people out of action in shortest time. Though he didn't use any Unforgivable Curses, he definitely used Dark Magic. Even I didn't recognize some of his curses.”

Albus' gaze wandered around and ended up at Sirius and Remus. Remus noticed his questioning expression and said,

"Emily is taking care of the children but Charlotte was injured."

"Is she badly hurt?"

Sirius shook his head.

"No, Poppy has said that she'll be alright again soon."

Alastor cleared his throat and leaned forwards,

"What I wanted to say is that although the other two children were better than the average and fought not bad either, if you consider that they are probably ten years old, the raven-haired boy could develop into a serious problem when he is an adult. I've never seen something like this. He is a natural fighter and most of the time he was fighting with more than one Auror. And he held out until the end. Only then he fainted. I've charmed myself invisible by the way and stayed there still for a while and what I saw was really strange. Our Lord seemed to be really worried about the child and he even picked him up. If the boy weren't important Voldemort would have never done this."

Albus Dumbledore thought for a moment,

"That is indeed odd. Do you know who this child could be, Severus?"

"I know Draco and the girl has to be Bellatrix Lestrange's daughter. But who the other boy is, I haven't the tiniest idea," Severus answered calmly.

Alastor Moody began to speak again,

"We should teach our children and students how to defend themselves as well so early. The Death Eaters teach their children everything that could be useful in the slightest. We should think about that one day. They will have to fight anyway when they are adults. The sooner they begin the better. Furthermore we should think about our three talented magicians. Obviously they are rather important to

our Lord, especially the raven-haired boy otherwise he would have hardly appeared there and that I somehow don't like at all. It's a pity that we couldn't kidnap them. The boy could really become a disaster for us in the future, if he will fight on their side."

Thoughtfully supporting his head with his hands, Albus nodded,

"You're right, Alastor, I didn't like it as well. I don't think that we'll have still a chance to kidnap them now. I hardly think that they will let the children sneak out in the streets without supervision once more. Probably the children wanted to go to Diagon Alley and unintentionally slid into the fight. But perhaps...Severus you'll try to find out who the raven-haired boy is. I must admit that I'm rather curious as far as his identity is concerned. "

Severus nodded shortly and the Order began to speak about other topics, although that wasn't very successful since the thoughts of nearly everyone were still revolving around the earlier happenings. Those members who hadn't been present at the fight felt for the first time in their lives a slight regret that they had missed a battle.

As Harry opened his eyes he was lying in his bed and had an ice-cold cloth on his forehead. The Dark Lord sat beside him and watched him.

"Caro and Draco, are they alright?" His voice sounded hoarse and croaky.

"Yes, thanks to you they have been injured only slightly."

Suddenly the red eyes stared piercingly at him.

"So, what you were actually doing there?"

Harry shivered. He felt terrible but he knew that he had overexerted himself. His head hurt dreadfully and because the light disturbed him he closed his eyes.

"We wanted to go to Diagon Alley. I'm sorry."

"I see. I must say that I'm proud of you, Harry. You did extremely well for someone your age. Nevertheless you won't do it ever again. It is too dangerous. If you and your friends want to leave the castle you will take guards with you. And now you will rest. As soon as you have recovered, we will begin to study the remaining Unforgivable Curses. Unfortunately I had to neglect you the last weeks. Furthermore I think that it is time that you attend the Death Eater meetings. Since the fight the Death Eaters are wondering who you might be. Soon it won't be possible any longer to hide your identity."

Then the Dark Lord stood up and left the room while Harry was thinking bitterly of his identity.

Why, why that had had to happen? Why his adoptive father had to have to murder his real parents?

Harry was still torn between his feelings for his parents he didn't remember and his adoptive father. Due to his chaotic feelings he had done nothing the last months. His feeling was saying him that he actually should hate his adoptive father for what he had done to his parents but somehow he couldn't, at least not really. But sometimes he did it when he dreamed about his mum or dad and today the house. Somehow it had hit him very much to see the house in such a destroyed state. Harry sighed. In the last months, since he had discovered the truth, a great resistance had broken out in some European countries, which had become quickly rather powerful. So the Dark Lord had gone there to destroy the resistance and had left him alone for weeks.

But Harry had been rather relieved. Since Harry had found out the truth he hadn't felt comfortable in the presence of the Dark Lord any more. He hadn't known how to behave. For some time he had really considered to speak with him. To tell him that he knew the truth. Then he had however rejected the idea. Harry was afraid from the reaction when his adoptive father would discover that he knew the truth. Why everything had to be so damned complicated? So he had done nothing. But really, what could he have done? Leave the castle? But where he could have gone then? Harry carefully turned around. His head felt like it would explode in any minute. He nearly had fallen

asleep when he shot up in bed. The things! Where were the things he had found in Godric's Hollow?

Frantically he looked around in his room, until he spotted his clothes which were hanging over his chair. Slowly he climbed out of his bed and stumbled to the chair. He picked his robe up and grabbed in his pocket where he fished out his snake first who curled herself promptly around his arm. Trembling he pulled out the things he had found in Godric's Hollow, immensely relieved that the Dark Lord hadn't found them.

Without any warning he had to hold onto the chair because everything was dancing in front of his eyes. Carefully he went back to his bed. He would take a closer look at the things tomorrow, when he was feeling better. Closing his eyes he was nothing but relieved that they had survived the battle – it had been really useful, he thought that he had so often leaved through the books much further that he actually should have – and that his adoptive father had believed him that they had wanted to go to Diagon Alley. Shortly afterwards he was fast asleep.

Remus Lupin was sitting on a bench near the Hogwarts Lake and was just singing softly to his daughter. He still couldn't really believe that this beautiful little baby was his daughter. She had his grey eyes and had inherited the dark brown hair of Emily; his little Meggie. She was now five weeks old and he was totally smitten by his little darling.

"Moony, what are you doing?"

Remus turned his head and saw Sirius Black standing in front of him. In his arms he was carrying his son and Lizzie. He put the whining children on the ground and sat down as well while the children began to crawl.

"I was singing a lullaby before you interrupted me, Sirius."

"You were singing? I didn't know you could that."

"Very funny, Sirius. Don't tell me that you never sing to Jamie."

His friend turned red and shrugged with his shoulders.

"How is Charlotte? Emily just wanted to visit her," said Remus.

"Yes, I know. I've met her and Alison as well who of course immediately handed Lizzie to me. She is feeling fine again. Tomorrow she can leave the hospital wing," Sirius said.

Looking at the blue water Sirius thought, how dreadful fear had seized him for a moment as he had heard that his wife had been injured in the fight and his boundless relief that it had been only a minor injury. Regarding Jamie and Lizzie Sirius felt such a strong urge to protect his family that he couldn't breathe anymore. He knew that he wasn't able to protect them. Today he had realized this with total clearness. Had this boy used the Killing Curse then he would have lost Charlotte today. Suppressing this terrible thought, he suddenly hit his fist onto the bench. Gazing at Remus with wild look in his eyes,

"I can't protect them, Remus. I can't and do you know what? Today I realized that Jamie will have to fight one day as well and that I can't prevent that!"

He saw understanding in Remus' eyes. Looking down at Meggie, he ran a hand across the baby's hair.

"Do you think that we will ever win that war that perhaps our children won't have to fight?" Sirius asked fiercely.

"I don't know. I think the chance that we'll win is as good as no existent. But we will protect our children, Sirius. Nothing will happen to them," Remus said imploringly and pressed his daughter close to himself.

"Are you sure?"

Remus didn't answer and for a moment they sat in silence and watched the children who were playing happily with each other.

"I wish they were here," Sirius said suddenly.

Remus was puzzled.

“Who?”

“James. Lily and Harry. They should be here as well. I miss them so much, Moony. I know it has been now nearly eight years but.... Harry, he would be now nine years old. Do you now this? My little godson would be nine years old. It was my fault. Everything was my fault.”

“Sirius, how can you say such a thing? You didn’t know that Peter was the traitor!”

“If I ever meet him again I will kill him, Moony.”

“So do I. I’ve even sworn it. On that day, they were buried I’ve sworn it. One day we will have our revenge.”

“Are you sure?” Sirius asked once more and again he didn’t receive an answer from his friend.

So Sirius and Remus sat there on the bench and remembered their friends and a little raven-haired baby.

Chapter 17

March 1990

Harry sighed. Somehow he wasn't making any progress with wandless magic anymore. He could now perform easy charms without a wand but that was it. Even to come so far had taken him incredible much time. At the beginning he had got immensely tired but after many attempts he had become better. But now it seemed that he had reached a point where he didn't make any progress any more at all. Perhaps he should have a look in the library if he couldn't find a few useful books which could help him along.

So far no- one knew that he could do such things. He even had begun to study Animagi in secret. This topic fascinated him greatly and he would give everything up to be able to change into an animal. He began to concentrate – he wanted to perform a wand-less spell once more– as the door opened and his adoptive father stepped in.

“Harry, we can continue your lessons now.”

Harry turned around and saw the Dark Lord standing in the doorway and sensed how he begun to feel uneasy again. Since the fight in Diagon Alley his adoptive father had begun to teach him the Cruciatus - and the Killing Curse. To teach him those curses the Dark Lord had used little black spiders and Harry had hated to kill and torture them from the very first moment his adoptive father had demanded this from him. Harry watched tensely as the Dark Lord went to the table and fetched a middle-sized wooden box from a pocket of his robe. He opened the box and a dozen black spiders rolled onto the table.

“So, Harry, you may begin,” he ordered in a cold and demanding voice that wouldn't tolerate any contradiction and stared with his red eyes at Harry.

Reluctantly Harry went in front of the table and pointed his wand at a big crawling spider.

“Crucio,” he said and he had hardly spoken out the word as he saw how the spider began to tremble and to writhe with pain.

A moment later he stopped the curse and the spider rolled helplessly to the side.

“Now kill it.”

Harry gulped. How he hated that! But nevertheless he pointed the wand once more at the spider and said,

“ Avada Kedavra!”

While watching how the green light killed the tiny creature he flinched and suddenly had an image of his parents before his eyes who, as he knew, had been murdered in the same way in which he had just murdered the spider. Harry shuddered slightly. He didn't want to imagine the death of his parents.

“Very well, Harry. So far it was excellent. But now we should take another creature on which you can practise the curses. The bigger something is the harder it is to perform the curses successfully. Something that is larger than those spiders,” his adoptive father said while waving impatiently his hand through the air.

He snapped his fingers and like from nowhere Nell appeared in the room.

“You'll cast the Cruciatus Curse on that house-elf. For the moment it has the right size. Then you will apply the Killing Curse to it. Luckily we've enough house-elves, so you can use as much as you need to learn the curses properly.”

Harry looked unbelievably at his adoptive father, while everything in him was refusing to do the demanded.

His eyes fell on Nell who was trembling madly and was looking up at them with fearful eyes.

“No, I can't do that and I won't do it.”

His voice was soft but nevertheless it sounded determined. Although he slowly felt fear rising inside him of the Dark Lord's reaction, he knew that nothing could bring him to hurt Nell; Nell, the only one, who

had shown him that he was loved as he had been little; Nell, who had comforted him so often and had taken care of him.

“You can not? You won’t do it?” His adoptive father stared at him as if the thought had never crossed his mind that Harry could ever disobey him.

“You don’t want to tell me that you aren’t able to torture this worthless creature?”

His voice was now icy- cold and had a threatening undertone.

“She isn’t worthless! “ Although Harry’s heart was beating rather fast, he lifted his head up and stared directly into the red eyes.

“She? How touching, Harry! The son of the Dark Lord has become attached to a worthless house -elf!”

Now his voice dripped with sarcasm. He just wanted to speak again as a high-pitched voice could be heard.

“Please, young master. Curse me! Please, don’t enrage the Lord any further. Please, curse me, My Lord!”

Nell prayed urgently that her young master would do it. She knew that she would do anything for him. She had to protect him from the anger of the Dark Lord and she could never allow that he would punish her charge, only because he didn’t want to curse her.

“So, the love is also mutual. But you heard it, Harry. It wants it too. Stop the nonsense finally and curse the elf! You’ve to learn the Unforgivable Curses after all. As my son you have to be able to control them. Do it finally! I don’t have time forever!”

But Harry shook his head.

“No, I won’t hurt her.”

The face of the Dark Lord contorted with rage. He wasn’t exactly used to his orders not being carried out immediately. Seconds later

however his features had dissolved into a cold countenance and a calculating expression entered his eyes.

“You will cast the Cruciatus Curse on the elf. Or I will kill it.”

Harry knew his adoptive father well enough to know that he would carry out his threat without hesitation.

“Please, don’t do that!” In this moment Harry nearly hated himself for sounding so weak. .

Although he hadn’t much hope that a plea would help him very much, he couldn’t stop himself from trying.

“Then do it.”

The Dark Lord looked at him with a merciless expression in his eyes and Harry knew that all debates of the world would not help him now. To save Nell’s life he had to torture Nell. There wasn’t any other solution. He hadn’t a choice.

With a fiercely shaking hand and as white as a sheet he pointed his wand at the small house-elf, while hoping that he would manage it. He knew that if he didn’t manage to curse Nell that his adoptive father would kill her then.

“Crucio.”

Though his voice quivered terribly, his curse was surprisingly successful. As soon as Nell started to scream however and to writhe in pain he broke the curse.

“That was much too short! Do it again. If you torture your prisoners later in the same way, you’ll never hear any useful information from them.”

Harry did as he was told and at each scream from Nell he flinched. When he couldn’t bear Nell’s crying anymore he stopped the curse.

“This was far better. And now kill that worthless creature.”

Harry's head shot up. He couldn't believe that his adoptive father had just said that.

"You said you wouldn't kill her, if I would torture her!"

"Exactly. But *you* will kill it. You have to learn the Killing Curse as well after all."

"No! Please, father, don't force me to do that! Please!" He didn't realize that for the first time in months he had called the Dark Lord 'father' again but now he looked up to his adoptive father with his emerald eyes that were full of emotion.

For a moment they stared at each other and something in Harry's eyes must have warned the Dark Lord to not overstep the mark since he finally nodded,

"All right then. It may stay alive."

He went to Harry and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"In spite of everything you did well. In one hour a Death Eater meeting will be held. You will attend, too. It is time that the Death Eaters hear who you are. Come in one hour to my rooms."

Then he turned around and left the room, while Harry flung himself next to Nell, who was curled up motionlessly on the floor.

"Nell? Nell! Are you alright?" His voice nearly broke while he carefully lifted the small house-elf up and laid her on the settee. Nell's eyelids fluttered a bit but she didn't answer him.

Harry ran frantically to the window, ripped it open, leaned out and a shrill scream escaped his mouth. Luckily he didn't have to wait very long before his phoenix finally came flying through the window.

"Rainbow, please help Nell."

Rainbow bowed its head, trilled shortly and flew to Nell. While his phoenix took care of Nell a wave of nausea suddenly rushed over him. He staggered to the bathroom and began to vomit fiercely while his

whole body was trembling like a leaf. After a few minutes he slid exhausted to the ground where he remained and began to stare at the opposite wall.

Too shocked, too dismayed to really realize the events that had happened. He just didn't want to believe that his adoptive father had really forced him to do such a thing. There he still lay one hour later when one of the many house-elves, whose face looked frightened, appeared and reminded him of the meeting. Dazed, he struggled to his feet and began slowly to go to the rooms of the Dark Lord.

Severus Snape stood in the hall of the castle and waited with the other Death Eaters for the arrival of the Dark Lord. Suddenly whispers broke out among the gathered wizards and witches and Severus lifted his head to see what the reason for this was.

His eyes fell on the Dark Lord who had just entered the hall. But this time he wasn't alone. Next to him a raven-haired boy was walking and Severus knew immediately that it was the one who had knocked out so many Aurors half a year ago in the fight in Diagon Alley. All attempts to find out the identity of the mysterious boy had failed in the last months. No- one had known anything about him. Severus felt how his curiosity increased while he watched how the Dark Lord sat down on his throne and conjured another throne next to him where shortly afterwards the boy took a seat as well. As soon as the Dark Lord began to speak every noise in the hall stopped.

"My faithful followers; let me introduce you to my son and heir!" he said and pointed with his hand at the child sitting next to him.

Severus' eyes widened while he tried to grasp the meaning of those news.

"You will obey him in the same way as me. You will protect him with your life and show him the same loyalty as me," the Dark Lord continued.

Severus noticed that Lucius Malfoy's and Bellatrix Lestrange's faces didn't wear the surprise and the shock like the other Death Eaters did and he realized that they had known it and that they had lied to him

as he had tried to ask them carefully about the boy's identity months ago.

He looked at the young Lord who seemed to be not very interested in the happenings. His head was hanging down and he stared on the ground.

Severus still couldn't believe it, while he wondered why no- one had ever thought of the possibility of the boy being Voldemort's son. Now, of course, everything made sense, even why the Dark Lord had been so worried and had appeared personally in the fight, was now understandable. Suddenly the boy lifted his head, as if he had somehow felt Severus' gaze on him. Their eyes met and he looked into strangely lifeless emerald eyes. Then the boy stared again to the ground.

In the meantime Severus shook his head. For a moment the child had really reminded him of James Potter, his archenemy from Hogwarts and of Lily Evans. He could have sworn that the boy had had her eyes. But that couldn't be. That was completely out of question. The strain of the last months had obviously gotten to him, more as he had believed, if he already began to see ghosts. To see James Potter in the son of the Dark Lord! Ridiculous! Goodness, he desperately needed a holiday to recover from his work as a spy. He shook again his head and realized that he hadn't heard a word of what had been spoken in the last minutes.

But those eyes. Sadly he thought back to Lily Evans. Her eyes however had been full of life with an incredible sparkle, whereas the eyes of the young Lord had been dull, nearly lifeless. Only the colour was the same. Severus was so confused and so occupied with his memories that he hadn't been able to pay much attention to the rest of the meeting anymore. Lost in his thoughts he didn't even notice that the meeting was over long ago. Only when a voice shouted,

"Hey, Snape, do you want to stay here forever?" did he come to his senses again, realized that the Dark Lord and his son had gone already and began to leave the now nearly empty hall. When he entered the park his eyes fell on a small figure. He held his breath as

he recognized that it was the son of the Dark Lords, who was sitting on a bench.

Severus looked quickly around and when he saw that he was currently alone in the park, he made the decision to kidnap the young Lord. What a success it would be, if he would bring the Dark Lord's son into his power. When Albus would discover that he was the son of Voldemort he would surely give his agreement to the abduction. Furthermore Severus hadn't forgotten what Alastor Moody had told them that the boy could become dangerous for them in the near future.

With a determined face he began to walk silently over the lawn, when he suddenly stopped in his tracks. He had just noticed a few guards who were guarding one of the entrances to the dungeons. Actually he had wanted to put the boy out of action with a Stunning Charm but now he thought that it wouldn't be such a good idea any more. It would be rather conspicuous if he would suddenly carry an unconscious boy in his arms. Surely the guards would immediately become wary.

Apart from this they had very probably heard by now that the boy sitting on the bench was the heir of the Dark Lord, if they hadn't known it already. It was a mystery to him how Voldemort had managed to hide this for so long. Some, like Malfoy, had known it however. But whether the guards knew it or not, he just couldn't risk it. No, the kidnapping had to look normal, so that they wouldn't become suspicious.

His only advantage was that they were standing relatively far away. Perhaps...yes, he would cast the Imperious Curse on the boy and then they would go together to the apparation place. So it would look like to the guards that he was only accompanying the young Lord but never would they suspect him of kidnapping the young Lord. Satisfied with his plan he marched over to the boy, who was sitting with his back to him, reached for his wand and said softly,

"Imperio!"

He ordered the boy to stand up and to turn around. When the child did so, he was again taken aback by the similarity to James Potter.

Only the eyes were different and he had a strange scar on his forehead which looked like a lightning bolt. His eyes however were glazed over and without emotions now. Severus shook himself out of his thoughts while cursing James Potter at the same time. Recently he had just managed to forget his former archenemy and now he had the fortune to run into a nearly exact copy of him.

He ordered the young Lord to come with him and together they began to walk through the park. Severus cast a glance at the guards and was relieved to see that they hadn't noticed anything. He had done it. He had kidnapped the son of Voldemort. When they were only a few metres away of the apparation point, he suddenly became aware of a quick movement next to him but before he could react a brilliant red light hit him in the side.

Chapter 18

When Severus regained consciousness again and slowly opened his eyes he stared immediately into emerald green ones, which now were blazing with anger. The young Lord was standing over him and pointed his wand straight at him.

“Why did you want to kidnap me? Stay where you are! Or I will curse you!”

Severus let himself sink back to the ground while he couldn't believe that he had been overpowered by a boy who was around ten years old and that this child had actually broken his Imperious Curse. Dismayed he realized how powerful Voldemort's son in reality was. Though his thoughts raced through his head, he didn't know what to answer and shocked he realized that it didn't matter which answer he gave.

He had lost and he would never see his daughter and his wife again. If he had still his wand, he perhaps would have still a chance, but in such case however he was totally helpless at the boy's mercy. So he said resignedly,

“I wanted to bring you to Dumbledore.”

“You are a spy,” The young Lord stated calmly and stared with his green eyes piercingly at him.

“Obviously,” Severus replied. He was surprised that the future Dark Lord had such a quick wit.

“What's your name?”

“Snape. Severus Snape.”

Suddenly the young Lord took a step away from him and said with a chilly voice,

“You can go Snape. I won't tell anyone your secret. But remember that I saved your life. One day you will pay your debt back to me.”

Severus, who was completely speechless, couldn't believe it. The boy wouldn't hand him over to his father? He wouldn't tell anyone?

"You should better go now."

Severus stood shakily up and looked at the child who still had his wand pointed at him. The emerald eyes watched him. Hesitantly he halted for a moment; he couldn't believe that he would see his family again and that he would actually escape. Finally he began to move.

"Your wand."

Severus turned around and caught his wand, which the boy had thrown to him.

Then he went to the apparation place, expecting any moment that a curse would hit him.

Arriving at Hogsmeade he began to walk quickly to the castle while pondering over the fact that he was now in the debt of a child who was the son of Voldemort and who had a surprising similarity to James Potter. But could he rely on that the boy wouldn't say anything? And why had the boy let him escape instead of calling the guards, who would have immediately heard him, had he loudly screamed? Severus shook his head. He didn't understand that. It didn't make any sense.

When he entered Dumbledore's office he saw that the whole Order of the Phoenix was gathered already.

Albus lifted his head and looked relieved at him.

"Severus, finally you came. What took you so long?"

Severus sat on his chair and said,

"I found out who the raven-haired boy is. He is the son and heir of Voldemort."

This unexpected revelation caused many to gasp for breath and to stutter to oneself while in nearly all faces shock and disbelief were written.

The blue eyes of the headmaster widened and shortly afterwards he looked at him with a grave expression on his face.

“That is certainly bad news.”

“Yes, but I have worse ones,” Severus replied and began to relate the events that had happen earlier today.

When Severus had finished, there was silence. With raised eyebrow, Alastor asked unbelievably,

“He did let you go?”

Albus inclined his head thoughtfully,

“I’m wondering why he did this. I fear however that we have no other choice than to trust in him keeping your secret, Severus. At least we finally know who he is.”

“So we’ll have to deal with two Dark Lords in the future,” Minerva said gloomily.

“Tragically the child can’t even be blamed. Voldemort will certainly make sure that his son will become as heartless and evil as himself,” Albus sighed, looked at the window and riveted his gaze than on Severus.

“Perhaps you could try if you might succeed in obtaining the boy’s confidence. Although I don’t know, if that would help very much, but everything what might contribute that Voldemort’s influence on him will weaken, could be later extremely valuable for us.”

“And if he should trust me, what I doubt very much? What then?”

“I don’t know Severus. Perhaps you can manage to win him over to our side. He is still very young, so he surely will be still suggestible. Find out as much as possible about him. Be careful, as he can betray

you anytime, but try to raise doubts in him, that the Dark side is wrong. Thereby perhaps a possibility will appear. ”

Severus stared at the headmaster as if the old wizard had lost his senses but didn't say anything. The next minutes the Order members sat silently together while thinking about the surprising news they had just discovered and which none of them had ever expected.

In the meantime Harry sat in his room and stared sadly at the pictures while his hands, which gripped the cover so hard that his knuckles turned white, were trembling madly. But the photos of his parents didn't comfort him. They only caused a terrible searing pain in him. Since he had discovered the photo album in the ruins of Godric's Hollow he had guarded this album like a treasure. He couldn't explain it but he hadn't even showed the pictures to Caro and Draco.

Caro had only seen the one photo he had found in the broken frame. Harry lightly touched the photo where his mum was brightly laughing and happily waving at him. Suddenly he closed the album with a loud snap, stood up and angrily ran a hand through his eyes where tears were forming.

He looked through the open door over to his bed and sighed. Nell, after Rainbow had taken care of her, had fallen asleep and Harry had laid the small house-elf on his soft bed. Hopefully she would recover soon.

Silently he went to the window and looked out. The events of today had made him understand that someday he had to choose. He had realized that he had to come to a decision on which side he was, that he had to choose either the Darkness or the Light. That he had either decide for the side of his parents he never knew or the side of his adoptive father. It was strange but only today he had really realized this fact.

Only today he had understood the situation in all its consequences. He knew very well that his adoptive father would demand further cruelties from him in the near future. He would have to torture and to kill and this knowledge caused him to shudder.

To torture Nell had been horrid for him and even now he still could see her terrified scared eyes which had looked up at him. He never again wanted to be in such a situation. Perhaps it was different with people he didn't know personally but he doubted that. Apart from this he didn't want to kill anyone at all. That's why he hadn't called after the guards when this Death Eater had tried to kidnap him today. As soon as he had realized that the man was a spy he had known that his adoptive father would punish the man without any mercy and very probably kill him, if he would ever discover the truth.

Although he had been angry at Snape for trying to kidnap him, he hadn't wanted to be guilty of his death. So he had allowed the man to go, but now he wasn't entirely sure anymore if that had been really the right decision. Couldn't the spy become dangerous for all of them? Would Snape try it again to kidnap him?

Harry didn't know it; decided however that he would be very careful from now on. Furthermore he had to think about his future behaviour. Somehow he had to find a possibility how he could avoid situations where he had to torture and to kill. Regarding his adoptive father, he would never forgive him that he had forced him to torture Nell. But what...

"Harry? Harry! Why have you locked your door?" A voice shouted suddenly and Harry recognized Caro. He sighed slightly and pointed his wand at the door. He wasn't so sure if he now wanted his friends around him. Seconds later Draco and Caro came inside.

"Where for God's sake have you been the whole day? We couldn't find you anywhere," His silver-blond friend remarked and dropped himself in one of the armchairs.

"I attended a Death Eater meeting," Harry answered.

"Really? Great! How was it?"

Harry observed how Draco's eyes flashed with excitement, a reaction he couldn't quite understand. He also went to an armchair and sat down. A moment he was silent, then he began to tell his friends what had happen today. Apart from his meeting with Snape, he told them everything. Somehow he had the feeling that it would be better to not

confide this secret to anyone. After he had finished he noticed that Caro stared on the table and it seemed to him, as if she would avoid his look. Meanwhile Draco shrugged his shoulders and said,

“It’s only a house-elf, Harry. Nothing else. You shouldn’t bother your head about that.”

Harry looked a bit unbelievably at his friend and answered with a chilly voice,

“For you Nell may be only a house-elf. But not for me. “

“But that isn’t right! You are the heir of the Dark Lord! You can’t be friendly to worthless creatures! That’s just impossible. And regarding your worries that we’ll have to kill someday, they’re totally baseless. They’ll be anyway only worthless Mudbloods. “

Harry stared at Draco, as if he would see him for the first time and said quietly,

“I’m not sure if I’m the heir of the Dark Lord...”

“What the hell is the meaning of this?” Draco wanted angrily to know.

“He isn’t my real father and...my parents fought against the Dark Side.
“

Although his friends had known this of course, it was however the first time where he had really said it aloud.

Suddenly Draco’s features distorted with anger and he began to shout,

“So *what?* Your parents didn’t know it better! But you should know it! You after all had the proper education! Or do you now want to betray us and become a worthless Potter?”

Harry’s eyes narrowed dangerously. Confused and hurt, as he had never believed that his friend would ever offend him like that, he shouted back,

“You’ve absolutely no right to speak about my parents like that! And you know nothing! Do you really want to torture and kill? Are you so desperate of becoming a Death Eater? “

“Yes! We would only kill worthless Mudbloods anyway! “

“Shut up! They aren’t worthless!”

“Of course they are! They are as worthless as your damned parents were!”

A crashing noise interrupted the quarrel. The glass of the windows had broken into thousand glittering pieces and now Harry’s eyes were shining with unbridled rage. Harry clenched his fists and tried to keep calm. He sensed, if he should lose control entirely, that more would break than only the windows. So he only said with an ice-cold voice,

“Leave my room, Draco. I don’t want to see you here ever again!”

For a moment Harry saw regret and dismay flashing through Draco’s eyes but then they become cold and without a word he turned and stalked out of the room. After Draco had fiercely slammed the door Harry buried his face in his hands and said with a broken voice,

“Why? Why did he say that? How could he do that?”

Caro went to him, sat beside him and put her arms around him.

“Harry, you have to forgive Draco. He was angry. He didn’t mean it like that. Try to understand him.”

“Understand him? Why did he attack me like this?”

“We all have learned that the Muggle are worthless and don’t have a right to live. We know that the wizards who are fighting against our side are traitors. Draco believes this. Especially because he loves his father so much. It was like a criticism of him and of everything Daco believes. In that moment where you said that you weren’t sure whether you are the heir of the Dark Lord, he didn’t see his friend in front of him, but a Potter. After finding out who you are in reality he

could forget that you are a Potter since you never behaved like one. But today you nearly said that the Dark Side is in the wrong. “

Harry broke away from Caro's arms and looked at his friend.

“And you? What are you thinking?”

“I...I think that Draco is right. Harry, today was a terrible day for you but that really doesn't mean that you have to abandon the Dark Side. What you had to do to Nell was awful for you because you love her. But basically she is only a house-elf, you shouldn't forget that. Apart from this Draco is right. You *are* the heir of the Dark Lord and everyone, who is against us, is worthless and evil. Remember what this damned Order and Dumbledore did to my Dad. They've just killed him. I hate them and they will pay for it! The Dark Side is right and you shouldn't worry so much about it, Harry.”

“So you as well think that my parents didn't know it better and that they were worthless? Then you too can leave my room!”

“Please calm down, Harry! I love you, you know that. You and Draco are more than friends to me and I only want to help you. We shouldn't scream at each other like that. We should be there for each other, so that we can solve our problems together. And regarding your parents, they...” Caro dried up in mid-sentence, as if she didn't know what further to say and looked insecurely at him.

For some time they were silent and an awkward quietness spread out in the room. Then Harry said softly,

“Caro, why do you think that Muggles are worthless? Or the people who fight against us, like my parents did it? Don't you think that everyone has the right to believe what they want? I thought very long about those problems but somehow I never knew what was right. But since I discovered who my parents were I...I can't believe that they were worthless and evil, only because they fought on Dumbledore's side. When I see their photos, then...somehow I have the feeling that if I kill or torture anyone like I did with Nell today that I would betray them with this. ”

“Harry, that is sheer nonsense! After all the Order killed my Dad! They torture and kill as well! Your parents certainly killed someone, too.”

“Yes,...you’re probably right. But...when I tortured Nell today, Caro, that was...it was just horrid. And if I have to kill anyone....Are you really want to kill later?”

Caro hesitated and without really noticing she draw invisible curls on the table.

“I don’t know, Harry. I’ve never thought about it before. You know that Draco’s parents practically brought me up and they always taught us that there is only a right and an evil side. You know it yourself. You after all had the same education as we. If I think of the murderers of my Dad, then I would kill those without any regret. I hate them more than anything else on the world. I would take revenge!”

“But if you had to kill innocents, for example children? Would you do it then? Only because they are the children of Muggles? Or would you kill Nell? Would you hurt her, if you had to? Only because she is a house-elf? The Order had killed your father, yes, but what were the Death Eaters and your father doing to the Muggle family? Who the devil started that war? The Dark or the Light side? But we’ve to decide someday, Caro! Would you do it? Would you kill anyone?”

Caro looked at him with a confused and fearful expression on her face. Both stared at each other.

Finally Harry sighed and laid an arm around Caro.

“I will speak with Draco tomorrow. I only hope that he won’t run to his father now. He won’t betray me, will he?”

“Harry! Draco may have said terrible things; he was angry and maybe confused as well. But he would never tell anyone what you have said!”

“I’m not so sure, Caro. He loves his father very much and when he believes that I changed the sides...”

“No, Harry! You mustn’t believe that! He would never betray you! I know him!”

Harry didn’t answer and when Bellatrix Lestrange entered the room a little later she found the heir of the Dark Lord and her daughter snuggled up in each other on the sofa and sleeping peacefully.

Alison Snape looked at her sleeping husband and sighed silently. Today she hadn’t been at the Order meeting because she had watched the children, so that she had discovered the events of today only, when her husband had told her. She had been shocked but at the same time unbelievably grateful that Voldemort’s young heir had saved Severus’ life.

Despite all difficulties and quarrels in the past she loved her husband still more than anything else. But today they had felt so close again as they hadn’t for weeks. Sometimes realizing how very nearly they had lost each other for ever only caused their love to increase more. She snuggled in her pillow and wondered what the young Lord might demand from Severus in the future. In such moments she wished that she could read in the future but unfortunately she couldn’t.

Chapter 19

Early in the morning Draco Malfoy was walking slowly through the dark corridors. After turning left and stepping to approximately the middle of the broad hallway he suddenly stopped dead in his tracks and his eyes riveted on the door in front of him. But he made not the slightest move to open the door.

He sighed and pondered again what he should say. He hadn't been able to sleep very well last night. The memory of the violent quarrel he had had with Harry yesterday hadn't given him much rest. After leaving Harry's room he had stormed down the hall to search for his father. Finally he had found him standing on one of the staircases that lead to the dungeons, absorbed in a conversation with Avery. His father had been a bit suspicious when noticing his flushed face but Draco had just said that he had been running too fast downstairs and had told him that Harry had got a headache so that he and Caro had to go earlier than usual. Luckily his father had believed him.

At home he had gone to his room and had thought about his argument with Harry, while wondering about the fact that Caro hadn't said anything at all. It wasn't like her to keep silent. First he had been absolutely furious, then he had felt betrayed and finally disappointed and sad. He couldn't understand his best friend. He still couldn't but he had realized that he hadn't had the right to make that one comment about Harry's parents.

Suddenly he asked himself how he would have reacted if he had been in Harry's place. Wouldn't he have defended his parents in the same way, indifferent to the fact that they had been on the wrong side? The silver-blond boy shook his head slightly. He didn't know for sure but it might be possible. He reached out with his hand; however he let it quickly drop again. He still hadn't the faintest idea of what to say. Silently cursing when nothing useful occurred to him, he only knew that he wanted Harry to be his friend again. Then, angry at himself for being such a coward, he raised his hand once more but all of a sudden the door was ripped open and Harry fell literally into his arms.

"Draco? What are you doing here? I just wanted to go to your house."

"I wanted...Harry, I only wanted to apologize. I mean..."

"Never mind, Draco. Come in. I wanted to apologize as well. I shouldn't have screamed like that and said that I never wanted to see you here again. I didn't mean it."

"No, Harry. You had every right to be so angry. It was my fault and..."

"Draco, it's okay. Forget it."

Draco felt an immense wave of relief rush over him. He hadn't thought that it would be so easy.

When stepping inside he suddenly stopped surprised.

"Caro? What on earth are you doing here?"

"Hi, Draco. You see, after you left, Harry and I talked a bit yesterday and so we... we fell asleep on the settee. And since nobody woke us up, I am still here. Nell just brought us breakfast. Do you want to eat as well?"

Draco nodded because he was rather hungry. He had been too nervous earlier to swallow anything at all. Harry and Draco sat down next to Caro and Harry called Nell to ask her to bring another cover for Draco. Thanks to Rainbows magic the little house-elf had entirely recovered and when Harry had discovered that Nell was fine this morning it had taken a load off his mind.

"You really are famished, aren't you, Draco?" Caro remarked amused, watching how he stuffed himself rather hurriedly with a roll.

Harry looked at his friend and suddenly felt ashamed that he had doubted Draco yesterday and that he had really thought he could betray him. Incredibly glad that they had reconciled with each other, he also reached cheerfully for a roll and fetched Diamond out of his sleeve. The little snake hissed something and began to meander through the various things which were standing on the table. Harry hissed back. Draco shuddered slightly and for a moment he stopped chewing.

Although he had often heard those conversations between Harry and his snake before, he found it eerie every time anew to listen to those strange noises. Meanwhile Diamond had arrived at Caro's plate and there she began to eat the jam which had fallen off a roll. Caro stared at the little reptile and asked stunned,

"Since when did snakes eat jam?" The dark-haired girl, although she still didn't like snakes very much, had become used to Diamond over all the years since she knew Harry and wasn't scared of Harry's pet anymore.

"She doesn't like every jam, only raspberry jam. That is practically her favourite food. If you had breakfast more often with me, you would know that," Harry explained and, seeing Draco's and Caro's faces, he began to laugh. A little later his friends joined in while Diamond wasn't bothered in the slightest by this and continued to nibble on her jam. All three were happy and relieved that they were reconciled with each other again but no one of them could forget the quarrel entirely.

The Dark Lord was sitting at his desk and was currently occupied in thinking about Harry. The realization that Harry had become attached to a worthless house-elf alarmed him. Such behaviour just wasn't right for his heir. Harry was supposed to be cold, merciless and have no scruples to kill a worthless house-elf. What on earth had he done wrong?

Of course he had noticed that Harry had been rather reluctant to kill the spiders but he hadn't paid much attention to it. But when Harry had refused to torture the wretched house-elf yesterday and had only done it because of his threatening, he had realized that there was something very wrong. How could he transform Harry into a real Death Eater? If Harry continued to be so hesitant and reluctant to kill and torture he would never become a feared dark wizard. He thought back to the moment where he had wanted to force Harry to kill the house-elf and the boy had indeed refused.

As he had looked into his emerald eyes he had noticed this mixture of refusal, fear, vulnerability and this nearly hopeless desperation. He had seen such a similar expression in the eyes of his numerous

prisoners many times; shortly before he had tortured them and broken their spirits or had killed them. He had known that if he forced Harry to do this that the boy would hate him. That's why he hadn't insisted on Harry killing the house-elf. Under no circumstances did he want the boy to hate him. Neither had he wanted to hurt Harry when he had pleaded with him not to force him. The Dark Lord shook his head. It scared him how he had got so used to Harry that the boy was able to refuse his orders. When he had taken the boy the thought that he could become used to him to such an extent would never have occurred him.

At least he could be proud that Harry had tried to ignore his fear and that he was so magically powerful and talented. If you excluded his reluctance to torture and to kill, everything would be absolutely perfect. But how could he teach Harry to enjoy using the Unforgivable Curses? He didn't know how and suddenly he realized that he actually knew nothing important about Harry. He didn't even have the faintest idea what hobbies the boy had.

Regretfully he saw that he had always been a teacher if he had spent time with Harry. He had always tried to teach him magic and Parselmagic or had told him about the wizard world and their enemies. Never had they spoken however about personal topics; apart from this one time when Harry had come to him and had asked about his mother. Till this day he didn't know why Harry had been so suddenly interested to find out the identity of his mother. A tapping noise against the window interrupted his thoughts. It was an owl with a letter which informed him that some of his Death Eaters he had sent to France years ago would return to Great Britain this afternoon to make a report.

Harry of course would attend again. Perhaps his friends should as well....Yes, why not? After all Lucius' son and Bellatrix's daughter had to learn as well how to rule. One day they would be on Harry's side and help him to reign over the world. The Dark Lord bent thoughtfully his head. Perhaps there was still a way to make the Unforgivable Curses sound appealing to Harry. It couldn't do any harm, if he would try it this way.

In the meantime Albus Dumbledore was thinking about the same boy as his archenemy Voldemort. He regretted it that Severus hadn't managed to kidnap the boy. On the other hand he wondered, if it wasn't better however that the kidnapping had failed. Otherwise they would have to keep the boy prisoner here and that surely wouldn't have helped that he joined their side.

Albus suddenly realized that he didn't even know the name of the child. It was a bit strange for him to think so much about someone whom he had never ever seen in his life.

Since the raven-haired boy had appeared in the battle a half year ago he had thought about him and since yesterday where he had discovered who he was he just couldn't stop thinking about him. Somehow he had the certain feeling that this child would bring the turning point in this terrible war. That he would decide whether the Darkness or the Light would be victorious. Albus Dumbledore sighed. In the moment the future looked rather desolately and hopelessly. He doubted that a child of Darkness would ever change to the Light side. The only hope was now that Severus would manage to influence the boy and to eventually draw him to the right side. Albus shook his head.

Who would have though that Tom would become a father? He couldn't imagine that Tom had ever played with his son. The imagination how Riddle romped around on the ground with a baby was absolutely ridiculous. He wondered if his former student was even capable to have any feelings for his son. That he had appeared in the battle then looked very much as if that was the case. If that was really true then Tom had made indeed a progress and had shown for the first time human features, if he actually really had any feelings left for his son. He wondered who the mother of the child was. Certainly a faithful Death Eater.

Looking at the window, Albus sighed. He absolutely didn't like it that how it looked currently a ten year old child would decide about the future of the world. He knew however that he couldn't do anything against it. He wasn't powerful enough to defeat Tom and his former student wasn't strong enough to defeat him. So that for years there was a stalemate.

Wistfully and sad he remembered James and Lily Potter. If those two had been still alive then threesome they maybe could have managed it to defeat Voldemort. All of a sudden the sorrow overwhelmed him, which for years seized him over and over again. Why on earth hadn't he been able to prevent that? Why hadn't he managed to protect Lily and James and little Harry? Again he saw himself standing in front of the destroyed house and looking horrified at the ruins. He laid his arms on the desk and buried his head therein as the sadness and the feeling of guilt crashed down on him.

Harry frowned and stared at the open book which lay in front of him. Somehow he just couldn't concentrate today. After they had eaten breakfast they had gone to their classroom where Bellatrix Lestrange had awaited them already and had immediately inundated them with tasks. Shortly afterwards she had left the room. For some time past it happened more and more that Bella or Draco's parents let them alone after giving them tasks. Harry looked up and mumbled,

"I've had enough of learning."

"Do you think I haven't, Harry? Wouldn't it be great, if we could play Quidditch now? The weather is currently so beautiful," Caro said and looked longingly out of the window.

"We haven't played Quidditch since eternities," Draco remarked sourly.

"The only thing we do is learning!"

"Or we get entangled in some fight," Harry added.

"Hey, we could..."

Before Caro could finish her sentence however, the door opened and her mother came back, so that the three friends, with resigned expressions, began to work once again on their tasks.

Three tiresomely hours later Bella dismissed them, before she still informed them that a Death Eater meeting would be taking place this

afternoon and that all three of them would attend it. While Draco was excited and seemed to be glad that he finally would participate in an assembly, Harry was not very delighted and he wondered if he now had to attend every day some meeting. Hopefully not. Then a terrible thought rose in him. Would he have to torture later on?

For a short moment he felt how panic seized him but then he blocked this feeling out while he began to rack his brain what he eventually could do to prevent this. After a delicious lunch and having made their homework rather listlessly and not very conscientiously and Harry additionally greatly nervous they set off to the hall. Halfway through, they collided with a short stubby man who came running out of one of the side corridors. The stranger looked up and snarled at them,

“Can’t you watch out where you...” But suddenly his eyes remained clung at Harry and he dried up in mid-sentence. A terrified and shocked expression entered his eyes while he squeaked stuttering and flinched back to the wall.

“No, that can’t ...can’t be. James forgive me, you know that I ... didn’t want to do it. I...”

Peter Pettigrew fell to his knees. He saw the face of his friend in his mind’s eye and heard his voice,

“Don’t worry, Peter. I know that we will be safe. I’ll be grateful to you forever that you have become our secret keeper. “

He saw Lily who smiled thankfully at him and he saw Harry, the little cheerful baby, whom he so often had held in his arms. For years he had suppressed it and hadn’t wanted to think about it that he had betrayed his best friends and thus had handed them over to death. For years he had said to himself over and over again that he hadn’t had another choice that it had been the only possibility to save his own life. But now the feelings of guilt which were buried deep down in him since the day he had betrayed his friends overwhelmed him and burst out of him.

“Who the devil are you!” The sharp voice ripped him back to reality and startled he looked up.

To the silver-blond boy who had spoken he didn't pay any attention. His gaze was fixed at the other boy and only now he slowly realized that it wasn't James at all. When he registered the emerald eyes however, he apprehended who was standing there in front of him. But that couldn't be. Yet it was the only conclusion and Peter knew that it was the right one. He looked so similar to James and then again he didn't since he looked simultaneously similar to Lily. He had Lily's eyes.

Suddenly he felt how panic rushed over him and he could only grasp one clear thought. He wanted away; as far as possible. He couldn't bear it any longer to face Harry. The shock he had suffered when seeing Harry had been too much for him. He began to concentrate and thanked God that he was able to change also under stress.

Meanwhile Harry, who had found the stranger familiar from the beginning, had finally remembered wherefrom he knew the man. He had seen this man on his photos in his album, together with his parents. As the man began suddenly to change Caro screamed surprised out. Harry on the other hand had quickly understood what the man had in mind. His intense studying of animagi lately had made sure of it and so he managed just in time to immobilize the man who was now a big dark brown rat with a stunning spell.

Caro stared at the rat and looked up,

"He is an Animagus? But what was the meaning of all this, by the way? He was, after all, totally crazy."

"My parents knew him. He was on some photos. Don't you think it is a bit strange that my parents knew a Death Eater? And then his behaviour. He looked as he had seen a ghost."

"And what are we going to do with him now? We can't just let him here, can we?" Draco asked who thoughtfully glanced at the rat.

"No. I think we'll take him with us. I want to speak with him. He can tell me something about my parents. I want to know why he knew them. And what he didn't want to do."

“Since it looked like he wanted to escape from here as quickly as possible, I doubt that he will answer you any questions.” Draco remarked.

“Well, perhaps we could use Veritaserum. Then we would know right away, if he is telling the truth or not,” Harry said.

“Veritaserum? How on earth shall we get Veritaserum?”

“I don’t know. But it would be probably the best option. We can think after the meeting how we get the potion.” After saying this Harry bent down, grabbed the rat and put it in one of his cloak’s pockets.

Minutes later the three friends had entered the hall and shortly afterwards Harry was seated on his throne and Draco and Caro had positioned themselves next to him.

The Dark Lord turned his head to Harry and said,

“You will observe everything, Harry. The more you observe the more you can learn. The meeting yesterday was only for introducing you. So pay attention to everything.”

Harry nodded and watched how the hall slowly but continuously filled up with Death Eaters. He looked around and noticed that many of the people present were casting curious searching glances at him. But every time when his gaze met with one of a Death Eater that person would immediately avert his eyes. Then a few Death Eaters stepped forward and after a short nod of the Dark Lord a tall brown-haired man began to talk about the current situation in France. The man spoke very fast and with a strange accent, so that Harry had difficulties to understand everything. But he found out that the resistance groups which Voldemort had believed destroyed had formed again and that it hadn’t succeeded to defeat them.

“You haven’t managed it? And why not?” The Dark Lord asked in an ice-cold tone.

“I...don’t know, My Lord.”

“You should know. You should always know the reason for your failure.”

Voldemort raised his wand and cast the Cruciatus- Curse on the man. The pitiable man fell to the ground and started to writhe in pain.

Harry began to feel terribly and he knew with sudden insight that he hated it and that it scared him and he realized that he didn't want to watch how people were tortured and killed. That he didn't know this man personally didn't change anything. Harry's hands grasped tightly around the armrest while praying forcefully. that his adoptive father wouldn't demand from him to torture this man. Although he had promised himself yesterday that he would think about a method how he could avoid such situations and had already pondered extensively about it earlier, he now realized that there was nothing what he could do. If his adoptive father would demand that from him he couldn't just refuse in front of all those Death Eaters.

He remembered very well how often the Dark Lord had told him that he never was allowed to show any weakness in front of his followers. To refuse when he was alone with his adoptive father could just about be overlooked but if he would do it here in public the Dark Lord would certainly not let him get away with it.

The screaming Death Eater reminded him suddenly of the man who had sold him his wand and whose death had caused him countless nightmares when he had been younger. He still didn't know the reason why his adoptive father had murdered him but he knew that the old man had done nothing except for refusing to answer his adoptive father for the first time. Perhaps this as well had been the reason for the murder. Then his thoughts wandered to Mr. Fortescue while he tried convulsively not to hear the screams. He wondered, if the ice-cream seller was still alive. He hoped it, although very probably no one would buy his delicious ice any longer now.

Meanwhile the Dark Lord had finally lifted the curse.

“So, perhaps now we can think what there is to do to destroy this resistance group. First...” The Dark Lord stopped and his eyes wandered over the gathered people in front of him.

“Where is Pettigrew? When I remember correctly I sent him to you to France years ago, didn’t I?”

He asked and eyed the commander of the French Death Eaters who in the meantime had got up from the ground.

“Yes, My Lord and he... returned with us but ...I don’t know where he is currently,” the man stuttered hesitantly and his voice trembled as he would expect at every moment another curse.

“Then it is a bit strange that he didn’t come, isn’t it? Perhaps you should send someone to search after him? As stupid as he is it can surely easily happen that he gets lost in the castle. It would be a real shame, if he would go missing where he had been so valuable in the past after all.”

Harry noticed how the gaze of his adoptive father shortly grazed him and he realized that the rat in his pocket had to be this Pettigrew and his curiosity what this man had to do with his parents rose in boundless spaces.

But why had been standing nothing in the newspaper then? And why had he been so valuable? Harry sighed and wished he would know the answer. The rest of the meeting dealt with finding tactically strategies which should enable the defeat of this French resistance group. Although Harry tried to listen attentively he didn’t quite understand very much and rather quickly he lost any interest. Finally the meeting was over and the Death Eaters, after bowing to the Dark Lord, began to leave the hall.

Harry sighed tremendously relieved that he hadn’t been asked to torture this man and that otherwise nothing bad had happened more. Only now he realized that he had been totally tense. He stood up and wanted to go as well since he wanted to leave the hall as soon as possible but was restrained by his adoptive father.

“Harry, I would like to speak with you briefly. Draco, Carolina you can stay also. This is likewise concerning you. I came to the decision that it would be sensible and for you instructively to be present in the torture chambers. So you will slowly learn how you can torture people most effective. And you both, Draco and Carolina, will be taught the

Unforgivable Curses. I think it is slowly time for you. But now I want to speak with my son alone. You two can await Harry in his rooms.”

After his two friends had left the hall his adoptive father suggested going to the park. Harry followed him while he was thinking about what the Dark Lord had just said. He knew with all his mind that he didn't want in the slightest to learn how to hurt people best and he certainly didn't want to watch.

“I will go to France Harry and stay there for about two weeks to destroy this resistance group once and for all. Those people have really worn out my patience now. That way it will go faster. If I would leave it to my Death Eaters it would take too long or it would very probably not succeed at all. Sometimes I really think that I am only surrounded by nothing but incompetent people. When I return I will teach you and your friends how to become a feared dark wizard and how you torture, kill and rule people.

By the way I have noticed your hesitance to torture that house-elf Harry, but believe me, you will get used to it. You only have to practice more. Then everything will be fine. Furthermore I will see to it that we will spend more time together. Harry, I realized that I have neglected you too much and that I was far too many times away. But we'll catch up everything.”

Harry who was walking next to his adoptive father felt how desperation rose in him and somehow he had the feeling that he would suffocate at every moment.

“Do I really have to torture and kill?” Harry whispered nearly inaudibly.

The Dark Lord stopped in his tracks and looked at him.

“Don't worry, Harry. As I said before you only need more practice. And then, in four or five years, when I have taught you everything what you need to know you will help me to rule over the whole world. Next we will destroy everyone who only dares to resist us. Unfortunately there are still too many groups of misguided people who believe that it would be better to fight me. Even here in Great Britain and here is the most powerful and worst resistance group with that old fool Dumbledore as leader. But when you are old enough and

have developed all your powers, we will be invincible and then we will conquer Hogwarts and level it to the ground and we will kill everyone who has dared to seek refuge in Hogwarts.”

Harry heard the rejoicing in the voice of his adoptive father and shuddered. To imagine which role he should play in this plan made him very uncomfortable and he knew that absolute nothing in the world would ever bring him to enjoy it to torture Nell or any other living being even if he would watch thousand torture sessions.

“My Lord, forgive me for the interruption but we finally managed to make the prisoners talk.”

Although Harry hadn't the faintest idea of what the Death Eater was speaking, who stared at him with a strange expression in his eyes, his adoptive father obviously understood immediately.

“Yes, I'm coming, Zabini. Harry, we will continue our talk when I return. I will come later to you to say goodbye.”

Harry could only nod while the Dark Lord turned around and in the company of Zabini who had disturbed them walked back to the castle.

A moment Harry stood there totally motionless but then he set off to go back to the castle as well while his thoughts began to race through his head. He sauntered to one of the benches which were standing in the park and sat down.

His eyes riveted on the enormous castle which towered in front of him; his home. Suddenly he felt completely left alone in the world and a deep desperation came over him. He felt trapped, trapped between a future he didn't really want and a past he couldn't remember. He wondered what his parents would have said, if they would have been able to see him now as the heir of Voldemort. Harry sighed and asked himself why he had such an aversion against torture that alone the imagination was enough to scare him off, to say nothing of killing. He didn't know if he would be ever able to kill anyone.

Again the picture of the wand-seller sneaked into his thoughts. He hadn't had a nightmare of him anymore about three years. But it couldn't be that this event which he had witnessed as a little child had

traumatized him so much that he now wasn't able to torture or kill anyone, could it? Even with the spiders he had felt terrible and had hated it with his entire mind. How he had felt to hurt Nell he would rather not think about.

While it was getting constantly darker and colder the raven-haired boy sat on the bench and stared at the castle without really seeing it. Meanwhile he thought of his future which his adoptive father had already planned out and where he had no say at all. At one time he felt an immense fury rising in him. Anger and rage about being as helplessly as it seemed. It was his life, wasn't it?

He was the heir of Voldemort and not a little child anymore. If he had managed to find out the truth about his parents and had succeed in defeating those Aurors in the battle, then he surely could come up with a solution and could take his life in his hands. Currently he neither wanted to torture nor to kill, nor wanted he to be forced to do anything and he didn't want to make a decision on which side he was either.

But had he really have to? He wasn't yet ready for it and suddenly he knew what to do. Months ago when he had found out who his real parents were he already had considered it. There he hadn't had tortured Nell however, so that now he really began to think about it and the more he thought about it the more he liked this thought. From now on he would take his fate in his own hands and he himself would decide what he would do. Sometime later he would also reach a decision but only if he was ready. He stood up and noticed only now how cold he was. With new won confidence he ran back to the castle.

When entering his room he found Caro and Draco sitting in his armchairs and playing chess. They looked up at him with curious faces and Draco asked:

"Where have you been so long? We're waiting for an eternity already."

Harry sat down as well and began to relate them his conversation with his adoptive father. After he had finished he added:

"I will leave the castle. Probably for a rather long time."

“What?”

Draco stared unbelievably at him, but Caro had a thoughtful expression on her face.

“You’re not serious, are you, Harry?” Draco asked.

“Yes, I’m, Draco.”

“But why!”

“Because I currently just don’t want to learn how I torture and kill in the most effective way. I couldn’t torture Nell once more, if my adoptive father would demand it from me again and I am afraid of the next Death Eater meeting. What if I have to kill anyone then? Furthermore I need time to consider what I want.”

“Harry, then I’ll come with you. I have thought a bit about our conversation yesterday and I have spoken to Nell earlier, when she has brought us the tea – by the way there is a cup for you as well – and I have realized that I do like her after all and that I wouldn’t want to hurt her. So that I would probably refuse as well to torture her if I had to. I think, you have changed me quite a lot, Harry, do you know that? Before I knew you, I wouldn’t have even dreamed of being nice to a house-elf. Apart from that my mother wouldn’t miss me anyway. And you need someone who takes care of you.” At the last sentence Caro smiled jokingly.

Harry looked stunned at Caro. As he had reached his decision he hadn’t thought at all that his friends could come along. He wanted to say something, but Draco was faster:

“Have you gone completely mad? You can’t just leave the castle! Where do you want to go then? Apart from that the Dark Lord would surely find you immediately!”

Harry’s face darkened.

“Yes, perhaps. But we could at least try it, couldn’t we? I thought to go to Godric’s Hollow. He doesn’t have the slightest idea that we

have been there already and that we know this place. So I don't really think that anyone will find us there."

"Godric's Hollow? But that is a completely ruin, Harry!" Caro exclaimed.

"I know but we could try to build it up again. We are wizards after all. So we should actually manage this.

First we could take everything with us and the only problem later on would be getting the food. We could teach us ourselves and we could finally decide what we want to do for ourselves and we could play Quidditch whenever we liked."

Caro nodded slightly.

"It could work."

"You really want to go away?" Draco asked while looking shocked from Harry to Caro.

Harry stared at his silver-blond friend and sighed:

"Yes, Draco, I think so. I can't ... I don't want such a future. Not now anyway. Perhaps I will change my opinion yet. But what is really counting is that I want to decide it alone.

I don't want to be forced to torture or to kill if I don't want it. Besides I think that it is wrong that the Death Eaters kill innocents and children who can't defend themselves. If I had to do this in the future...I couldn't do that Draco. Even if it is true that Muggles and Muggleborns – in contrary to us – are inferior, it wouldn't necessarily mean that we have to kill all, would it? My mother was as well a Muggleborn. Does that now mean that you're better than I because your parents are both purebloods? Draco, would you really kill if you hadn't any concrete reason for it? Only just for fun?"

Draco felt how fury rose in him but he kept silent since he didn't exactly want to endanger their reconciliation and yet again start a fight. Harry, who was watching him, added:

“Don’t think of what you’ve learned for once or what your father had told you. Would you kill for example a child only because it is a Muggle?”

“Yes, I think so.” He finally said hesitantly while for the first time in his life he began to think about those questions.

That Muggles were inferior, thereof he was still firmly convinced but on the other hand Harry also had right.

It really wasn’t absolute necessary to kill little children. It was very difficult for him to admit this since his father had always told him the exact opposite. He still remembered it well that his father, as he had been younger, had brought him a toy once and had told him that he had murdered a Muggle family. His father had given him the toy as a kind of trophy and only now years later he asked himself if that had been really necessary to kill this strange child who would have been the same age as him now if it had survived then.

Confused Draco shook his head. He didn’t want to have such thoughts and he didn’t want to think about that either.

“So you are on the Light side now?” Draco asked quietly.

Caro lifted one eyebrow and shook forcefully her head.

“Good heavens, Draco, of course not. Therefore I find Dark Magic much too interesting. Besides I will take revenge on the murderers of my Dad. They will pay for what they did to my Dad, even if it was Dumbledore in person. One day I will find out who it was and then I will take revenge!”

Harry meanwhile kept silent while hoping that his friends wouldn’t ask him on which side he was since he wouldn’t have been able to answer. Instead he looked at Draco:

“Draco, please come with us.” But even before he said this, he knew that it was in vain.

“I? No, I could never leave my parents,” Draco said faintly.

“Would you come otherwise with us if it weren’t for your parents?”

“I don’t now.”

“Are you still would like to become a Death Eater?” Harry asked.

“I guess.”

“Why?”

Draco looked at Harry and opened his mouth, only to shut it again a moment later. A confused expression crept into his eyes. He had taken it always for granted that he would become a Death Eater one day. He had never thought about whether he wanted it or about the why.

“I don’t know. It is the right thing to do? To achieve power?”

“Do you know that that doesn’t exactly sound very convincing? But if it is for power, there is no must for you to become a Death Eater, Draco. Power we could achieve also without my adoptive father.”

“How so? Besides, Harry, you don’t know yet if it will work at all. What, if the Dark Lord catches you and brings you back?”

Harry shrugged with his shoulders and said more confident than he felt:

“It would be an adventure in any case, however, Draco. Moreover think how often we could play Quidditch.”

“Come with us, Draco,” Caro added as well.

Draco shook tentatively his head.

Awhile they were silent and everyone was lost in his own thoughts. Finally Harry sat up to reach for a biscuit and suddenly he felt a strange weight in his pocket. At once he remembered the rat, which he had totally forgotten. He grabbed in his pocket, pulled the animal out and laid it on the table.

“Well, what shall we do with him then?” Caro asked.

“We’ll take him with us. Somehow we’ll have to get Veritesarum. Is it really so difficult to brew?” Harry stood up and went to a book-shelf, where after some searching, he fetched a big large book. He turned the pages nearly to the end and began to read.

“Good gracious, we would need a month to make it. Besides it will be probably *really* rather difficult.”

Harry sighed disappointed. It certainly looked like they would have to find another way to get the potion. He sat down again and buried himself in the book while Caro and Draco continued their game of chess. For the rest of the evening neither of them spoke about Harry’s and Caro’s plan to leave the castle.

Chapter 20

April 1990

Harry sighed while staring at the many luggage which was standing all over his room. It seemed that he had packed everything in what had been standing here. He looked around to see if he had forgotten something but when seeing that he obviously had indeed thought of everything he slightly waved his hand and the countless things began to shrink. After he had started to learn wand-less magic he would always perform magic without a wand whenever it was possible and he was utterly fascinated that this worked as well as with a wand.

Of course so far he could only do minor spells but he was determined to master more difficult and powerful charms and curses soon. As now everything was stowed away he began to stare nervously at the door. Caro and he had agreed to leave very early in the morning so that it would take a while for anyone to notice their disappearance. While waiting Harry rocked impatiently up and down and wondered if it was really such a good idea to leave the castle.

As he had made his decision almost two weeks ago he and his friends had begun to carefully plan and to think thoroughly about everything. They had searched for useful spells and curses, had pondered what they would definitely need and had counted their pocket money. Nevertheless he still had only a rather vague imagination how their new life would be and his uneasy worried feeling had somehow increased as his eyes had been riveted on the door, as he assumed, already endless minutes. Then he finally heard a soft tapping and Caro stepped in.

"Did everything go right?" Harry asked.

"Yes, luckily my mother didn't notice anything. I've used the silencing charm. As a precaution, it wouldn't have been so terrific if she would have heard me." Caro said and clutching onto her broom she took a deep breath.

"So, then we'll be leaving soon, I suppose?"

Harry nodded.

“Yes.”

They cast a quick glance at each other and turned their attention to the door. Although Draco would stay in the castle he had wanted to say goodbye to them. So they waited. Both had the sensation that the minutes passed like an eternity.

“What is taking him so long?” Caro asked more to herself than to Harry.

“No idea. But he should have been here long ago. Hopefully nothing has happen.” Harry nervously responded.

Suddenly the door burst open and their silver- blond friend stormed in. He looked dreadful. His face was pale and under his eyes he had dark shadows.

“Draco, what the hell happen to you?” Harry exclaimed worried.

“Sorry, I’m late. I’ll come with you.” Draco said in a flatly voice, ignoring the question he had been asked. Only now Harry and Caro noticed the broom he was holding in his hand. Harry stared bewildered at Draco. He knew with absolutely certainty that something wasn’t right in the slightest with his friend.

“Draco, what happened? Why did you so suddenly decide otherwise?”

“I come with you, okay? But don’t ask me anything. I don’t want to talk about this.” He replied harshly.

Harry looked into the pained grey eyes while wondering what on earth had caused Draco’s state. Since he didn’t want to press Draco into telling he nodded reluctantly but he promised himself that he would find out what had startled Draco so much.

Furthermore there wasn’t time anyway to lead a discussion now so that everything had to wait until they had reached their destination. The faster they got away off this place the better.

“Then come. Let’s leave. Nell!” Harry shouted and seconds later the small house-elf appeared who was carrying some packages which contained, as Harry assumed, a delicious variety of food. He took them from Nell and picked her up. They went to the window and after charming themselves invisible they mounted their brooms. Moments later they flew out into the clear, cold air. In front of them they could make out the beginning of the sunrise. It promised to become a beautiful sunny day.

Harry couldn’t help as to smile happily. Finally he was flying again. Since the fight in Diagon Alley last September he hadn’t flown anymore. As the icy wind was blowing against his face he just felt wonderful and his worries disappeared as well. He rose higher and higher while flying curves and loops. He felt Nell’s tiny hands grasping his waist tighter. The angry frightened hissing of Diamond caused him however to slow down again. So he flew lower and looked out for his friends.

Although invisible every one of them had charmed their wand in such a way that it was spreading a dim blue light, so that they couldn’t lose each other or crash together, like it had nearly happened on their former trips. He spotted them and flew next to one of his friends. Since it seemed that no one of them was willing to speak they made their way in silence while Harry was thinking about what happening could have occurred that Draco had changed his decision to stay in the castle. All of a sudden Harry could see the ruins of Godric’s Hollow under him and he felt how the excitement and the uneasy feelings returned to him. Shortly afterwards the three friends landed carefully in the knee-high grass. After charming themselves visible again, Caro looked at them and asked:

“And now? I think, it would be best to take care first of the wards, wouldn’t it?”

Harry nodded and fetched something out of his pockets. As he had amplified it Draco and Caro could see that it were some sheets of lined paper.

“That would be probably really the best since the current ones are very weak and partially totally destroyed. Here I’ve written down some spells, we could use. ”

Draco took his wand and said vigorously:

“Let’s get going then. Let’s begin to make out of this place a secure spot.”

While saying his friends what charms they should perform Harry felt how fear rose in him. Wouldn’t it been better to stay at the castle? How would they survive? Wouldn’t they find them here? Then he shook fiercely his head. Whatever difficulties would appear, he would think about them, when they would occur and together they would master them all right. For now it was first important to surround Godric’s Hollow with protection charms and curses, so that they would be safe here.

Charlotte Black who was currently occupied with making breakfast and simultaneously correcting the homework of her students shook enervated her head as her quill fell to the ground and rolled under the table. As she had finally found it and had just turned back to the essays, she was interrupted by a giggling happy voice.

“Mummy!”

She spun around and smiled at her son who would soon have his second birthday and who momentarily was trying to knock over his high chair by flinging himself back and forth. She went to Jamie, bent down and kissed him on his soft hair while wondering, if she would ever see Jamie’s Daddy again. Two days had already passed since she had got a message of Sirius and now she was waiting with terrible impatience which she nearly couldn’t bear for a new letter which would tell her that her husband was still alive. While embracing her little son she felt tears forming in her eyes.

Since she had discovered that her aunt and uncle had been killed, it happened often that she wasn’t able to hold back her tears. Nearly two weeks ago the Dark Lord had gone to France, together with thousands of his Death Eaters to defeat the resistance which had

been led by her uncle. He and her aunt had been among the first ones who had been killed.

She still couldn't believe it that those two people who had taken her and her sister in after their parents had been murdered, who had raised them and had given them all the love they had possessed, were now dead. They had given them a home, after their world had caved in overnight, and yet she would never see them again.

Charlotte remembered the little house in France where they had lived, the small garden with the old oak, on which she and Emily had always climbed as children to play there or to hide. She thought back at her last visit two years ago, as she had been expecting Jamie. It had been so lovely, peaceful days, which she had spent with them both. But the last time where she had seen her aunt and uncle had been last August, as little Meggie had been born. Charlotte closed pained her eyes. Sirius was now there; in the country where she had spent a part of her childhood and her entire youth. Dumbledore had sent many Order members there to help the desperately fighting resistance. Sirius and Remus were among them and the certainty that her husband was in middle of the danger zone was weighing heavily on her.

Without any warning she began to sob, while she was still hugging Jamie to her.

"Charlotte? Did something happen!" The scared voice startled Charlotte. She turned around and shook her head.

"No, nothing has happen, Hermione." Charlotte stepped to the girl who looked still rather alarmed, and pulled her close.

"Nothing has happen, honey. I only had to think of my aunt and uncle." She said softly and stroked Hermione's head. Charlotte felt ashamed that she had lost her composure and thus had so scared Hermione. As Sirius had announced to her that he wanted to adopt Hermione two years ago she would have never believed it possible that she would someday love the girl so much. But meanwhile she loved Hermione like her own child. Hermione clung to her and whispered.

“Will it never stop? Why are they doing such things to us? Can’t they leave us alone? I hate them, they destroy everything. I hate them!”

Charlotte shuddered as she heard the hate in Hermione’s voice. It was awful when children were brought to hate.

But she couldn’t blame her for it, she knew that Hermione had witnessed the murder of her parents; a horror that she would never forget. Apart from this there was a merciless hate seething in herself, which terrified her at times.

“I don’t know Hermione. I don’t know.” She said sadly while desperation rose in her.

Lately she increasingly had the feeling that she couldn’t take it any longer. The war destroyed them more and more, every day a bit further. Ceaseless and she couldn’t do the slightest thing against it. Then she straightened up.

It wouldn’t be of use for anyone, if she let herself go. She had to be strong, for her husband, Jamie and for Hermione, who needed her and Sirius, for her sister and all the others who meant something to her. She had to be strong but sometimes this was more than she could handle.

“Mummy, hungwy!” Jamie cooed all of a sudden and thus reminded his mother of the still half finished breakfast.

Hermione smiled, stepped to Jamie and picked him up.

“Do you know that if you’ll continue to grow so fast, you will soon be too heavy for me to carry you?”

She said while swinging the baby through the air. Jamie reached for her with his tiny hands and began to laugh while his eyes seemed to beam.

After they had eaten breakfast Hermione said good-bye to Jamie and Charlotte, fetched her wand and began to run through the castle. Since she was already a bit late for the lessons she had to hurry.

When finally reaching the right classroom she knocked and went in. She wasn't surprised that everyone was present already.

"Sorry, that I am late, Bill." She said struggling for breath.

"It's alright, Hermione." Bill Weasley answered in a good mood and smiled at her.

She grinned back and took her seat next to Ron. A half year ago the adults had out of the sky decided that the younger children who weren't yet eleven should be taught as well in Defence against the Dark Arts. Hermione didn't know what the reason for this had been; the adults had only said that it would be necessary that they could also defend themselves. Since then a seventh year would teach them every day for one or two hours and Hermione had therefore got infinitely proud her first wand. As they didn't receive any marks, the lessons were great fun but nevertheless they learned a lot. As soon as she had recovered her breath, she raised her head begun to listen attentively what Bill had planned for today's lessons.

Meanwhile Bella stared astonished at the empty room which extended itself in front of her. Where for God's sake were the children? As Carolina hadn't appeared at breakfast today and since she also hadn't found her daughter in her room which strangely had been blank, she had cursing begun to search for her daughter. But when seeing now that the room of the young Lord was in the exact same condition as of her daughter, and that here as well were no sign of any furniture, slowly a suspicion was rising in her. But that couldn't be. Could it? Bellatrix spun angrily around and collided with Lucius Malfoy.

"Bella, have you seen Draco? He didn't show up for breakfast today."

"No, but I saw neither the young Lord nor my daughter today. They have disappeared! And apparently they have run away!"

"Run away? Such a nonsense, Bellatrix. Probably they are in the park and play Quidditch. "

“If they are in the park, Lucius, then how do you want to explain that all the stuff in Harry’s and Carolina’s rooms has vanished into thin air?” She asked in a sarcastically sweet voice.

Lucius eyes widened surprised, he pushed passed her and looked in the room.

“No, that can’t be true. Draco would never run away,” He answered with deep conviction.

Bella raised unbelievably an eye brow.

“So, wouldn’t he? And where on earth then are they, if they didn’t run away?”

“Draco would never do such a thing, Bella. After the fight in Diagon Alley I led a serious discussion with him and he promised me not to do such a foolish thing again. They have to be somewhere in the castle. It would be the best, if we would search the castle from top to bottom. “

Bella turned her eyes heavenwards and replied snappily,

“Please, do that. But you’ll see that I am right. “

Lucius cast a venomous glance at her and apparated.

After Bella had waited a quarter- hour and had pondered, where the children could have gone to and what they should do now, she begun to look for Lucius and found him finally in Draco’s room where he was standing rooted to the spot and staring at the mess in front of him. Various cupboards and drawers were half open. Some capes and robes lay carelessly on the ground. Apart from these pieces of clothing and a few other things the room was empty as well. All books, personal things had disappeared. Bella looked at Lucius,

“Do you believe me now that the children have run away?”

Lucius however shook confused his head.

“Draco wouldn’t do that. Perhaps they’ve been kidnapped.”

“Kidnapped?”

“Yes, why not? Pettigrew has disappeared as well and till now he hasn’t turned up again. He could have done it.”

Bella stared at him.

“Did you lose your mind? Harry has protection charms on his door and his rooms. Any stranger who tried to break in there would immediately alarm the whole castle. My house is also protected. If someone had tried to break in there tonight, I would have noticed it. And you so have secured your house that not even a mouse could sneak in unnoticed. No, Lucius, your theory is just absurd.”

A moment Lucius looked silently at Bella. He didn’t want to believe it, it couldn’t be true. Draco would never break his promise towards him. But then he reluctantly admitted that Draco had done exactly this. The children had run away. There wasn’t another explanation.

“You’re right, Bella. But I just don’t understand it. Why should the children run away? They’ve not the slightest reason therefore. And what, damn it, have they in mind? Where they want to go at all then?”

“I’ve not the faintest idea, Lucius, but we’ve to find them as soon as possible; before they fall into Dumbledore’s hands.”

“When I’ve found Draco then he’ll get house arrest for the rest of his life.” Lucius Malfoy hissed who slowly begun to seethe with rage as he realized what not all could happen. Then he groaned.

“Goodness, when Narcissa discovers that, then...”

“Narcissa? You are worrying about your wife? And what is with our master! Can you imagine what he’ll do with us if he learns that we’ve lost his son? Already last time, he wasn’t very delighted, when the children appeared right into the fight in Diagon Alley, if you remember.”

Lucius’ eyes widened startled and finally he began to think straight again, as he slowly overcame the disappointment Draco had caused him.

“We’ve to find him, before the Dark Lord returns. Otherwise we are dead!”

Bella nodded grimly.

“There for once you’re right, Lucius.”

In the evening Severus Snape sat comfortably in one of his armchairs and looked pleasantly relaxed into the dancing fire while his almost two year old daughter was sleeping peacefully on his chest. In their rooms it was nearly impossible that someone would find out his secret marriage and so for Severus there was the only place where he could enjoy his family- life without having to fear that he would be discovered.

As he gazed down at his daughter a radiant smile appeared on his slender face. A sight you could see rather rarely. Very carefully he ran his hand over Lizzie’s soft black curls. Her long eyelashes fluttered slightly and Severus held his breath while praying that she wouldn’t wake up. To get Lizzie to sleep was always extremely nerve-racking since Lizzie didn’t think the slightest of it and rather wanted to play. As Lizzie didn’t make any move to open her eyes however, Severus sighed relieved and closed also his eyes while listening to his daughter’s softly breathing.

A loud tapping against the windowpane startled Severus up. He ripped open his eyes and Lizzie opened her blue ones as well while her little face abridged and she began to cry.

“Oh, no. Schhh Lizzie, don’t cry my sweetheart. Everything’s alright. It’s okay my little one.”

Severus murmured as he gently rocked his daughter but Lizzie seemed to pay no attention at all to her father’s soothing words.

“Mummy, Lizzie wat Mummy!” She squealed and Severus sighed.

Alison had gone to Charlotte and Emily a little while ago and how he knew his wife she wouldn’t return so quickly.

The volume of the tapping had meanwhile increased considerably. Annoyed and angrily Severus set his still crying daughter in the armchair, marched to the window and tore it fiercely open. When seeing the unknown black phoenix he whipped out his wand. The magical bird dropped a letter to the floor and flew into the room.

Severus spun around and saw how the phoenix settled next to Lizzie and begun softly to trill. Lizzie instantly stopped crying, stared astonished at the phoenix and reached out for him with her tiny hands. As soon as Severus was sure that the phoenix hadn't the intention to do something to Lizzie, he studied the letter and started to check, if it hadn't been cursed with any spells. When he couldn't find anything he picked up the letter and opened it curiously.

Snape

Send me as soon as possible a vial of Veritaserum.

Harry Riddle

Severus glanced at the one sentence while he wondered for what on earth the heir of Voldemort needed Veritaserum. He had not the faintest idea but basically it absolutely didn't play a role. After all he knew that he had to do whatever the child demanded from him since he could unfortunately inform the Dark Lord at any time that he was a spy.

So Severus turned around, went to his daughter who, with a bright smile on her tiny face, still was occupied to stroke the black shimmering feathers of the phoenix. He bent down and picked Lizzie up. This however turned out to be a mistake since he had hardly taken her up she set off to scream again. Taken aback he set her down again and instantly she fell silent while cuddling against the phoenix.

After cursing the bird and reassuring himself that nothing could happen to Lizzie he left his room and hurried down to his dungeons. There he searched in the many shelves for the potion and at a fast pace he set off to return, where to his relief he found everything as he had left it. The phoenix trilled shortly and seconds later he flew with

the vial out into the night. Amazingly Lizzie didn't begin to cry though but raised her little hand and began to wave.

Severus closed the window and made himself and Lizzie comfortable in the armchair again. But now Lizzie looked up at him with her bright blue eyes which reminded him so much of Alison, expectantly and wide-awake and had presumably not the slightest intention to fall asleep once again. Severus sighed. This would be once more a long evening.

Harry leaned against the window and stared out into the darkness. The faint light of the moon had dipped the garden in eerie shadows which seemed to dance in the wind. He felt totally exhausted but that was hardly astonishing since they had worked the whole day. They had set up the wards and had built up Godric's Hollow again.

Although they still had to take care of a vast amount of things and to look after the garden they had managed however to change the ruins into a comfortable little house. As Harry turned around and gazed at the living room he felt pride. Caro was lying on the settee and had apparently fallen asleep. Next to her, on one of the pillows, Nell had nestled down. The little house-elf had spoiled them today with incredible tasty meals and had also helped them energetically with her elves- magic.

His gaze wandered further and his smile disappeared when looking at Draco who sat in his armchair like a marble statue and was staring with an expressionless face into the fire. Although he and Caro had tried to persuade Draco to tell them what had happened they could have had talked just as well to a brick wall. Harry was worried but as so long he didn't know what troubled his friend he couldn't do anything to help him. A rustling caused him to gaze at the table. There Diamond was currently busy to make herself a sleeping-place out of the letters Draco's parents and Bella had sent them.

The letters had reached them a few hours after they had left the castle and had been port-keys. Harry still couldn't believe that he had been so stupid. Draco had hindered him at the last minute to pick up one of the letters and had said that his father had surely cursed them.

After a while they had detect that they had been indeed enchanted and namely in port-keys. Thereupon they had angrily destroyed the letters, but Harry couldn't still apprehend that he had been so carelessly.

You could have believed that in all the years he had been taught by his adoptive father he had learned not the slightest. It was of course clear that Bella, Lucius and Narcissa would try everything to find them.

Pressing his nose against the cold glass he tried to spot his phoenix whom he had sent to Severus Snape, some time ago. Hopefully he would transmit him the Veritaserum soon. He was so anxious to finally discover what Pettigrew had had to do with his parents. Currently the rat was residing in a large wooden box with antiapparating spells placed on it, so that he wouldn't be able to escape. Harry sighed; somehow it was a strange feeling to know that he was standing in the house of his parents.

As they had built it up today again he couldn't have prevent to imagine how his parents had died here, murdered by his adoptive father. A loud tapping caused Harry to flinch. He had been so absorbed in his thoughts that he hadn't noticed Rainbow landing on the window ledge. He opened the window and detected delighted the little vial which was bound to one of her legs. Smiling he took it while Rainbow trilled shortly and flew into the room.

"Harry, what's this?" Caro asked who meanwhile had sat up and was now drowsily rubbing her eyes.

"That's Veritaserum."

Caro blinked unbelievably and Harry noticed that Draco who had turned away from the fire, was also looking rather astonished.

"Where on earth did you get this from?" Caro wanted to know.

"As I first attended a Death Eater assembly I figured out that one of them is a spy. Since I thought that it is more likely for him to get the potion, I wrote him earlier that he should send me a vial."

"A spy? And you let him off?" Draco inquired angrily.

Harry looked at his friend and said quietly,

“I didn’t want to be guilty of his death.”

In Draco’s eyes flickered something and he nodded.

“I see.”

His voice sounded strangely defeated and Harry and Caro cast at each other helpless and rather clueless looks.

For a moment they were silent. Finally Caro asked, “How do we actually want to question Pettigrew? We’ll have to somehow ensure that he won’t escape us.”

Harry nodded energetically.

“Yes, of course.” He said and put the flacon with the potion on the table.

Then he went to the hall and fetched the wooden box in which the rat was captured. When returning to the living room he opened the bin, took his wand and forced Pettigrew to change back into a human being. To prevent him to flee Harry chained him with his magic. Pettigrew struggled against the bonds and looked frantically around. As his eyes fell on Harry he turned ashen and began to stutter:

“Harry, you won’t kill me, will you? I did never want to do it! Harry, please, I beg you, don’t kill me!”

The last part was a desperate scream and Harry, by now a bit irritated, put a silencing charm on him.

Meanwhile Caro had taken up the Veritaserum and Draco had stood up as well.

“Shall we use the Imperius- Curse to bring him to drink this?” Draco asked and pointed at the small vial in Caro’s hand. Harry bit thoughtfully his lip and nodded then.

“Yes, I think this would be the best. But you’ll have to help me. Currently I’m too exhausted to do it alone. Furthermore I don’t think I would manage it alone.” Harry answered.

Since the Dark Lord had gone to France Bella and Draco’s parents had already started to teach Draco and Caro the Unforgivable Curses. Although both his friends hadn’t manage to break the Imperius- Curse yet they could help him however to curse Pettigrew. Harry pointed his wand at the animagus, nodded to his friends, counted loudly to three and then they shouted together:

“Imperio!”

Harry gave Pettigrew the potion and ordered him to take a sip. When Pettigrew’s eyes became glassily and they saw that the potion started to show effect, they finally could exhaustedly lift the curse. Harry noticed that his hand trembled and knew that he had magically overexerted himself today. It might have been wiser if they had waited till tomorrow to question Peter. But after all he had waited already so long and to wait any longer he wouldn’t bear.

So he let himself fall on a chair. Excited he begun to ask question after question and he learned more about his parents than he had ever dreamed. He discovered that his dad had also been an animagus that he together with his best friends Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and unfortunately Peter Pettigrew had wandered often over the grounds of Hogwarts and that they had invented and carried out countless pranks during their school days. He learned that they had been called the Marauders. His mother however had always tried to stop the four friends.

She had played the piano and had loved to read books while sitting next to the Hogwarts Lake in the soft grass. He learned that he had a godmother and a godfather and countless other things, which meant so incredible much to him; told by a traitor as he now knew. Suddenly the glassy absently gaze disappeared and Peter’s eyes became clear again. Obviously the potion had lost its effect. He blinked, raised abruptly his head and looked straight into Harry’s eyes while tears were streaming down his face.

"I am so sorry, Harry. I didn't want to do it. But I didn't have a choice. "

Harry stared wordlessly at the traitor of his parents and when speaking his voice wavered a bit,

"Why didn't you tell my parents that you were forced to be a spy by Voldemort before they made you their Secret keeper? You could have gone into hiding together with my parents. If you had told surely the Order of the Phoenix would have found a solution!"

Peter opened his mouth but closed it a moment later. Apparently he didn't know what to say. He lowered his gaze to the floor and whispered nearly inaudible,

"I was so scared; so scared that he would find out." Harry didn't need to ask whom Pettigrew meant with 'he'.

"What'll you do with him, Harry?" Caro threw in, while eyeing Peter disdainfully.

While staring at the broken man Harry realised that he felt pity for him. Although Peter had betrayed his parents he knew very well that another had murdered them, and namely his adoptive father.

Confused Harry shook his head.

"I don't know. I think he could stay here. He could run errands for us." He said yawning and noticed only now how incredible tired and worn out he was.

Peter lifted jerkily his head and looked dazed and hopefully at him.

"You won't kill me, Harry?"

"No, Peter. But don't you dare to betray us and to tell Voldemort where we are. Otherwise I could still change my mind."

Peter flinched, looked around and seemed to register his surroundings for the first time. His eyes widened.

"That...can't be true. Where...are...we?"

"In Godric's Hollow. We ran away and have almost built it up again. My adoptive father has not the faintest idea that I know Godric's Hollow. Here he won't find us."

"Adoptive father?"

"Yes, the Dark Lord has raised me."

"He has ...raised...Harry, he'll find you! Believe me, you can't hide from him. That's impossible."

Harry swallowed.

"If you don't tell him, he won't figure it out."

Peter looked at him and in his eyes a strange expression appeared.

"I won't betray you, Harry. Not once again." He said softly.

"But the Dark Lord has ways and means, which you can't even imagine. Believe me, he'll find you."

"What a lot of rubbish! No one will find us here! And you won't betray us!" Draco screamed who pointed with a trembling hand his wand at Pettigrew.

"Avada Ked..."

"Draco!"

"No!"

Horried and frightened Caro and Harry grabbed Draco's arms.

"Draco, what the hell was all this about? What's wrong with you?" Harry who sensed how his friends was quivering had suddenly enough of Draco's strange behaviour which he had displayed all day. Resolutely he took him by his arm and led him to the settee.

"Draco, now tell us finally what has happened this morning! We're your friends, you can trust us, you know that."

Draco slumped down and mumbled,

“They killed them. They just killed them!”

Caro, who had set down next to Draco’s other side, hugged him comfortingly and asked quietly:

“Who killed whom?”

When Draco didn’t answer, she whispered:

“Tell us, please, we only want to help you.”

“Yesterday I couldn’t sleep. I had always to think about you wanting to leave the castle. Sometime I got thirsty. So I stood up and went to the kitchen to fetch me something. On my way back I noticed my Dad. He stood in front of the fireplace and via floo powder he went to the dungeons. And I...goodness, I don’t even know why, but I followed him. I think I was just curious.” Draco said bitterly and broke off.

In Harry rose a dreadful thought and for a moment he closed his eyes. He could imagine, what would come next. He had heard the terrible screams, which were echoing from the dungeons, often enough. He had to force himself to ask:

“What... what happened there?”

“They didn’t see me. But I could observe everything. There were a woman and a little girl. My Dad...they tortured them and the...girl, Caro, she looked similar to you. She held a teddy bear in her arms, like the one you had always in the past. They just, just killed them!” Draco sobbed while Caro hugged him close to her.

“Oh, Draco.”

After they had calmed down Draco to a degree they said goodnight to each other, left Pettigrew, guarded by Diamond, Rainbow and Nell, behind in the living room and went silently to their own rooms. As Harry was creeping in his bed a while later and dropping his head on the soft pillow, he sighed relieved. He felt as he was hurting everywhere. His head ached terribly.

It had been just too much what had happened today. The flight, the need to perform so many charms at once, the stories Peter had told them, the awful things Draco had witnessed. But he noticed very quickly that he absolutely couldn't come to rest. Images of his parents spun around his head, he remembered the frightened face of his mum that he had seen as the Dementor had come close to him. He saw his Dad sneaking over the grounds of Hogwarts with his friends, his mum sitting near the lake and reading a book. Some time he threw the blanket aside, jumped off the bed and ran to the window that he ripped open. He was so hot.

As the cold air caused him to shiver he closed it again, turned around and looked for his photo album. Back in bed he slowly leafed through it. Now he recognized as well a few other persons and for the first time he paid real attention to the other people who were portrayed there. So far he had registered them only marginally.

He looked at Sirius Black, his godfather, at Remus Lupin and the woman who was holding him as he had been a baby must be his godmother, Minerva MacGonagall, as he presumed.

As he continued to turn the pages over his gaze fell on one of his favourite photos. His parents stood next to each other and his mum was holding him. He stared at the beaming faces of his parents and suddenly he began to cry. The stories Peter had told him had brought his parents close to him and had made him realize unmistakably what he had lost. So he cried for that what could have been when his parents hadn't been killed on that one Halloween so many years. It took long before Harry finally sobbed himself into a restless sleep.

Chapter 21

Sirius Black groaned while tightening his grip around Remus' waist

"Can you make it a while longer?"

But in this moment he felt how his friend slumped unconsciously against him. Cursing he managed just in time to not drop him and to lay him nearly gently on the ground. Panting for breath he sat down next to him. Alertly he peeked around but when noticing nothing conspicuous he sighed relieved while running a hand through his head. He was exhausted and he would have nothing preferred better as to lie down and to sleep but he knew that he somehow had to get Remus on the fastest way to Hogwarts.

The situation couldn't have been worse. Namely they had escaped by a hair' breadth with their life but in this terrible fighting they had both lost their wands and Remus had been injured. Be damned Voldemort, thought Sirius.

They hadn't had a chance against him and his thousands Death Eaters. It had been too many. He regarded Remus' ashen face and reluctantly he realized that he just had to risk it. An apparition was the only possibility.

He was so tired that he barely could keep his eyes open and Remus needed help as quickly as possible.

Never before however was he apparated in such a bad condition and he knew only too well what consequences it could entail. Apart from this he also had to take Remus with him and a double-apparation was already difficult under normal circumstances. Sirius kneeled down, grasped Remus' arm and took determined a deep breath while praying that he wouldn't splinch them. Then he began to concentrate.

At the same time the Dark Lord was pacing furiously through his room. His red eyes were glowing in a scary light. He stopped abruptly in his tracks, turned around and sized the three people, who were kneeling in front of him, up with an ice-cold gaze.

“How is it possible that you weren’t able to find him in one week!” He whispered dangerously quiet.

While staring at Lucius, Bella and Narcissa he felt how boiling rage shot through him. How those idiots could have lost his son? His heir? When he had returned a quarter hour earlier from his stay in France – it had taken him longer as he had actually planned to crush the resistance – and had discovered that Harry and his friends had disappeared one week ago and that Lucius, Narcissa and Bellatrix hadn’t been able to find them so far and had indeed dared not to inform him he had seethed with fury. Without asking them what exactly had happened he had imposed them with the Cruciatus Curse, so long until his anger had ceased a bit by hearing their agonizing screams.

“My Lord, we sent them Portkey letters but they didn’t work and we searched everywhere but they aren’t nowhere to find.” Lucius said with a hoarse voice.

The Dark Lord frowned thoughtfully. He couldn’t believe that the children had been kidnapped. But what had been their reason for running away? Letters which had been charmed to be Portkeys wouldn’t be, of course, of any use since he himself had taught Harry to be wary of everything he would get so he could assume that Harry would check every letter he would receive. Could it be that he had fled from the tortures he should learn? When remembering his walk in the park with Harry where the boy had asked him, if he would really have to torture and kill, this thought occurred him as not so devious.

The reason wasn’t so important however right now; more urgent was that he found Harry as soon as possible. Fortunately the Malfoys and Bella had had so much sense at least that they had kept the disappearance of the children a secret. He didn’t want to think about it what would have happened if the Order of the Phoenix had discovered it.

This fool Dumbledore would have searched day and night to find the children. While thinking about the various possibilities how to find them he suddenly held his breath. Of course! Cursing himself that he didn’t think on it earlier he immediately set off to see if he had been

right. Seconds later he knew that a certain little house-elf hadn't also been seen since the children had disappeared. Back in his study he stepped smiling to his desk, took a sheet of parchment and paused. He had to be careful, he mustn't rush anything.

Otherwise it could easily happen that he would lose the boy forever. Although there was of course always a possibility. Even, if everything would fail. But perhaps he could still prevent it. As a plan begun to form in his head he felt how his anger slowly blew over. Yet nothing was lost. Confidently he began to write a short message. Then he ordered Lucius to send it to Harry, reached out his hand and started to whisper.

It was early afternoon as Harry, Caro and Draco sat on the soft blue blanket and relaxed. Although it was cold it was a beautiful day. Rather unusual for April but the sun was shining and warmed them pleasantly while a slight wind was blowing.

They had just played Quidditch. After they hadn't been able to play for so many months, now they hardly could break it off, such fun they had. Harry smiled happily while grasping his cup of tea tighter, taking a sip of the hot liquid and letting his gaze wander around. Draco was currently eating a sandwich, Caro had turned her face towards the sun, had closed her eyes and got a tan, Diamond had curled herself up and was sleeping and Nell was mumbling on a piece of cake.

A fair way off Peter Pettigrew was meanwhile busy to prune the twigs and branches of the savaged hedge. Since he had to do it without magic he worked already the whole day on this. Harry grinned slightly; Peter had been really useful the last days. He had gone even two times to Diagon Alley to go shopping.

The one week since they had arrived here had been just marvellous. Every day they had played Quidditch, had talked and laughed with each other or had worked a bit on the still unfinished things who had still to be done in the house and in the garden. Draco had recovered from his terrible experiences, at least Harry hoped that.

The first days he had been rather reserved but meanwhile he seemed to feel better. The only annoying thing had been the many letters they

had received from Bella and Draco's parents. Anything else however had been wonderful. Harry would have never imagined that it would be like this; so perfectly dreamlike. A quiet agonizing scream jolted him back into reality. His tea slopped over and was running hot across his hand but he didn't sense it. His entire attention was focused on Nell whose face was marked with fear and contorted with pain. She only managed to say in a choked voice,

"Master is calling."

Then, with a soft noise, she disappeared. Harry looked shocked at Caro and Draco who stared with white faces at the spot where Nell had been just sitting. Harry felt how fear seized him. A flapping of wings caused them to flinch and at the same moment something hit Harry's head. It was a single sheet of parchment. Graceful, almost charming, it fluttered to the ground where it remained. With thumping heart Harry glanced at the clear angular handwriting of his adoptive father.

Harry

If you don't want that I accidentally curse your house-elf I would suggest that you come home immediately!

Father

Harry stared at the parchment and couldn't believe that everything was over. He knew that he had to go back. He just couldn't allow that his adoptive father killed Nell. He had not the slightest doubt that his adoptive father would do exactly this. A house-elf more or less made no difference to him. Harry gulped. He hadn't a choice however. If he wanted Nell to be alive, he had to return. Defeated he raised his head and looked wordlessly at his friends. Draco was watching him; he grimaced and lifted rejecting his hands.

"No, no, no. Don't say me that we'll have to go back only because of such a wretched house-elf!"

"Draco! How can you say something like this? You know that Harry loves Nell. And I...I do it as well. We'll have to return." Caro said with a wavering voice.

Draco's eyes widened horrified.

"But...but I can't go back! My Dad will kill me!"

Harry looked at his friends and said with difficulty:

"You could stay here, if..."

"Forget it, Harry! Nothing will bring us to stay here while you have to return! If we go back than we'll go all together!" Caro exclaimed.

"Won't we, Draco?" She added.

Draco hesitated one moment and nodded finally.

"They'll be terrible infuriated." Harry objected and when noticing Draco's unhappy face he continued.

"It would be really better, if you would stay here. I wouldn't mind it."

Draco snorted and shook his head.

"Harry, either we all stay here or we all return. There isn't another possibility. If you namely return then the Dark Lord will discover where we are anyway. Yes, I know that you wouldn't betray us but a drop of Veritaserum would be for example enough already. Moreover there are still other facilities as well."

Harry sighed sadly. Reluctantly he realized however that Draco had absolutely right.

He reached out his hand, put Diamond in his pocket and looked up. Their eyes met and for a moment there was such a deep understanding and trust between them that Harry all of a sudden realized how very much Caro and Draco meant to him.

"Then we should better go packing now." Harry said flatly and looked around for Pettigrew. He couldn't spot him anywhere. Probably he had gone back into the house to make a pause, Harry thought. Obviously he hadn't noticed that Nell had disappeared. While striding slowly over the lawn Harry tried to blink away his tears. He had the

strange feeling that he was going to suffocate. How could he have forgotten that house-elves were magically bound to their owners? Of course Nell hadn't stopped to be the property of the Dark Lord as she had begun to take care of him. The helplessness which was rising in him made him angry. A single mistake and everything was broken!

And now? What would happen yet? He didn't want to learn how to torture and kill! Arriving in the house he stormed upstairs to his room where he snatched for his things and threw them violently in one of the suitcases which they had found in the castle. He doubted it that he and his friends would find once more a possibility to escape from the headquarters of his adoptive father. Ten minutes later they met in the hall.

"What'll we do with Pettigrew?" Caro asked while beginning to collect her things out of the living room. Harry shrugged with his shoulders.

"He'll come along. He can change himself in a rat again. But definitely he won't stay here. I'll go searching him."

Harry turned around and went in the garden. After Pettigrew had rather reluctantly changed back into his animagus form, Harry put him into his box, raised his gaze and stared wistfully at Godric's Hollow.

"Harry, we should go now."

Caro laid shortly her hand on his arm and he saw that she had tears in her eyes. Harry blinked, nodded and cast the house of his parents a last glance. Then they mounted their brooms and flew into the sky.

The way back passed in silence. None of them remembered to charm themselves invisible. The only thing what occupied their thoughts was how the reactions of the adults would turn out when they reached the castle. Rainbow trilled comfortingly while flying next to them; the three could only think of their fear however. Meanwhile Harry blamed himself heavily. Why, why only hadn't he thought of this?

After a while they landed in the forest which surrounded the castle. They sneaked into the secret passage and trotted dejectedly to the study of the Dark Lord. In front of the right door they paused and stared at each other. No one of them said a word. Harry gulped

nervously; he would have given everything in order to have not being here just now. When sensing the light weigh of Rainbow who had settled on his shoulder, he bit his lip, lifted his hand and knocked while feeling how his heart sank. Then he opened the door and they stepped in. They had hardly entered as they heard the cold voice of the Dark Lord.

“I want to speak alone with my son and remember my orders.”

Lucius and Bella rose shakily, bowed, grabbed their children by their arms and dragged them with expressionless faces out while Narcissa whose eyes were riveted on Draco, was following them with a happy smile. Harry looked after them. As the door had slammed shut he lifted defiantly his head:

“Where is Nell? What did you do to her?”

The red eyes of his adoptive father narrowed and studied him piercingly.

“I didn’t do anything to it and now it should be in the kitchen. But I am much more interested in this: Where have you been the entire last week? And why did you run away at all, Harry?”

Harry blinked unbelievably at his adoptive father. Actually he had expected everything but not that he would ask him in a calm, almost indifferent, tone where he had been and why he had fled. Could he however trust him that he hadn’t done anything to Nell and that she was all right?

“Why did you run away? And where were you?” The Dark Lord repeated his question and this time his voice had an impatiently undertone.

“I didn’t want to torture and to kill! I don’t want to watch any torture sessions and I don’t want to be forced to torture or kill, if I don’t want to and we were in Godric’s Hollow!” It broke out from Harry while glaring furiously at his adoptive father, angry that he had forced him to return. In the next instant he could have bitten his tongue off. How on earth could he have said this?

The red eyes widened surprised.

“Godric’s Hollow?” A sudden dawn of understanding appeared on Voldemort’s face.

“So you have discovered it? How?”

Harry hesitated one moment, then however he begun to talk. After all it didn’t play a role anymore. As he had finished he even felt a strange relief. The Dark Lord nodded slightly.

“Impressive. So that’s why you suddenly wanted to know who your mother was. “

Abruptly he stepped to Harry, who startled flinched back, raised Harry’s chin and stared with his red eyes straight into Harry’s emerald ones. Rainbow trilled warningly but Voldemort didn’t pay any attention to the magical bird. Harry sensed how he trembled, he wanted to avert his gaze, yet he didn’t manage it. Those red eyes seemed to mercilessly adhere him.

“And what shall I do now with you, Harry?”

Harry did not quite know what to answer.

“Nothing?” He murmured tentatively at last,

The Dark Lord let go of Harry and asked:

“Do you hate me?”

Harry stared at him and he said the first thing which came into his mind.

“I’ve hated you as you forced me to torture Nell. “

“And now?” The red eyes eyed him searchingly and Harry lowered his gaze to the ground.

Suddenly Harry realized that he didn’t know it. He just couldn’t clothe his feelings, which he had for his adoptive father, in words. He didn’t love him exactly above all things, he was even a bit afraid of his

adoptive father but did he really hate his adoptive father? He was angry at him, that was for sure; when he thought of his parents then he hated him at times as well. But actually he didn't really hate him, did he?

"You don't hate me? Although I killed your parents?" The voice of his adoptive father who was still studying him closely jolted him out of his musing

Harry blinked confused.

"I don't know. But somehow I don't do it. Not really, anyway. Only sometimes... you've raised me and have taught me so many things... but as you've forced me to torture Nell and wanted that I kill her..." Harry broke off and one moment they were silent. Harry looked at his adoptive father and tried to see what he was thinking but the face of the Dark Lord didn't reveal anything.

"Why didn't you kill me?" Harry couldn't prevent that this question all of a sudden burst out of him. Since he had discovered the truth he had often wondered about this query.

His adoptive father raised one eyebrow.

"I tried. The killing curse I cast on you rebounded however and you survived."

Harry tore his eyes open, with such an answer he hadn't reckoned. As the words really dawned on him however, he shook dazed his head.

"I've survived the Killing Curse? But that's impossible!"

"Yes, normally it is. I don't know why but you survived it, Harry. I thought then that you had to be extremely powerful, more than I and thus managed to fight the curse off. I can't say however if this was really the reason for it. This caused your scar by the way. "

Unintentionally Harry's hand darted to his forehead while his thoughts began to spin around in his head.

“And that’s why you decided to take and raise me? Because you thought I would be more powerful than you?”

“Yes, Harry. Exactly. I wanted to use your power, with your help I wanted to conquer and rule the world and destroy any resistance. But obviously you are struggling with all your mind against it. Perhaps you are still too young. We’ll see how you will think about this in one or two years. Come, I’ll bring you to your room.”

The Dark Lord laid an arm around Harry’s shoulder and led him silently to his rooms where he left him. As the door had closed Harry remained staying and stared at it. Never had he thought that his encounter with his adoptive father would go like this.

He had awaited a punishment, angry scolding and rage but nothing of this had happened. His adoptive father hadn’t even become infuriated as he had told him that he knew who his real parents were. He shook his head. He didn’t understand it. Sighing he reached into his pocket and began to pack everything out while thinking of his friends. Hopefully it wasn’t so bad for them. Actually, he thought, he could go and visit them to see if they were alright. Then he also could look after Nell at the same time. He went to the door and wanted to open it. But it was locked. Bewildered he whispered,

“Alohomora.”

As his charm didn’t help, he tried more powerful magic. This however hadn’t the wished effect as well. He couldn’t believe it. Even as he had been five years old, he had managed it to break the charms on his door and now he wasn’t capable of doing this? After a while he realized that the spells on his door had been altered and that he was indeed locked up and that he really wasn’t able to open his door. What on earth did his adoptive father had in mind? What was he planning? Did he want to hold him captive in his room forever? Confused

Harry sat down on the ground and brought his knees to him and slid his arms around them. So he was now a prisoner. Suddenly he jumped up, ran to the window, ripped it violently open and felt a magic barrier. Rainbow trilled and flew through, she returned however instantly to him. Full of hope he looked at his phoenix,

“Rainbow, can you...”

“No, Harry. I can’t destroy the barrier. The magic can’t do anything to me since I am a phoenix but I don’t have the power to make it disappear. “Rainbow sang sadly and laid her tiny head on Harry’s shoulder.

Shocked he stared out in the park and the fact that he was trapped seemed to paralyse and cold fear rose in him while only one question was plaguing him. What did his adoptive father try to achieve by that? Why had he locked him up? His adoptive father had surely to know that he wouldn’t escape without Nell. So why?

Chapter 22

31.10.1991

Sirius Black lighted the little candle with trembling hands and put it on the grave, while the icy coldness caused him to shiver mercilessly. For one moment the tiny flame flickered fiercely; then it went out. Sirius cursed and fetched his wand. This time the candle didn't expire. Sadly he looked at the silver lighter he was still holding in his left hand.

Lily had given it to him a long time ago. Although it was now exactly ten years ago that James, Lily and Harry had been murdered, he still felt the deep pain of his loss and mourning when thinking of them. He had learned to deal with it to some degree but sometimes he missed them so strongly that he choked. His feelings of guilt had also not decreased over the years. That was mainly due to the fact that he just wasn't able to forgive himself for persuading James to take Peter as the Secret Keeper. Lifting his head he looked up into the grey sky. Only now did he realize that it had begun to snow. He blinked, stared again at the grave and sighed. Like every time when he came here, he whispered,

"Forgive me."

As the memories threatened to overpower him, he curtly turned around and went along the narrow pathway. At the small gate he abruptly came to a halt. He knew that Godric's Hollow was only a few kilometres away and all at once he felt the wish to see the place again where he had been so incredibly happy so many years ago and where he had so often spent his time. For an instant he still hesitated but then, before he could change his mind, he apparated.

Harry stared absentmindedly at the slowly falling snowflakes which gradually turned the park and the trees into an enchanting white landscape. How he wished to be outside, to feel the cold icy air and to run through the snow, while the wind could blow against his face. Ever since they had been forced to return one and a half years ago he and his friends hadn't left the castle anymore. Although they were

taught magic and everything was almost as before they had run away, there existed a small difference.

They were kept prisoner. They couldn't break the charms on their doors and when they were going to their classrooms they were accompanied by Lucius or Bella. The Dark Lord came often and played chess with him, taught him Dark Magic or just talked with him.

Especially this behaviour worried Harry deeply and made him wonder. It drove him mad not to know what his adoptive father was planning. His behaviour was just strange and totally out of character for him. He hadn't forced him to torture or to kill, in fact he hadn't even mentioned Harry participating in torture sessions or that he should learn to torture and to kill at all. Harry absolutely didn't understand it.

When he remembered how angry his adoptive father had been when he hadn't learned the Imperious Curse fast enough and as he had refused to torture and to kill Nell, it was even more unexplainable. Furthermore he hadn't participated in one single Death Eater assembly since their return. But the Dark Lord wasn't the only one who behaved rather strangely, Bella and Draco's parents did it as well. Draco had got the greatest shock of his life and hadn't been able to calm down for weeks as his father had behaved as if nothing had happened and had neither scolded him nor punished him.

His friends also hadn't any idea what this could mean. It seemed as if they were handled with kid gloves and of course they were guarded the whole day. Furthermore he had quickly realized that the adults had given them only books which didn't contain the more powerful spells and especially those curses which counted as the Darkest Magic. Harry had the strong suspicion that the adults didn't want them finding a spell which would break the curses on their doors and windows.

He assumed that it was one of the not so common curses. What was strange as well was that Caro and Draco weren't going home anymore as they had always done before they had run away but were now staying with him. Shaking his head he asked himself for the thousandth time what the Dark Lord had in mind. Nell took care of them and as Harry had quickly found out the Dark Lord had indeed

spoken the truth when he had assured him that he hadn't done anything to the little house-elf.

Harry sighed sadly. He wished so much to be back at Godric's Hollow. That one week full of freedom had been just dreamlike. There they had been able to decide for themselves what to do. But Harry was determined once more to find a way to leave the castle which was currently only a prison for him

He wanted to flee from this insecure future which was causing him sleepless nights. He knew that his adoptive father was planning something; he could feel it every time his adoptive father regarded him with those strange piercing glances.

The thing which was bothering him extremely was how to solve the problem with Nell. He hadn't the slightest intention in leaving Nell behind. And of course he had to find an escape route. He turned around and his glance fell on the wooden box which was standing in one of the shelves. They had managed to hide Peter from the adults. Although it probably hadn't been very comfortable spending most of his time in there the last few months, he was still alive at least and, as long as he wasn't caught, in safety.

While looking at the wooden box he suddenly caught his breath. Had he been out of his mind the entire time that it hadn't occurred to him earlier? There he was trying to become an Animagus for one and a half years and to think that all this time Peter could have shown him and his friends how to turn into an animal. And perhaps this would even help them to escape. Furthermore, Peter could be of use to them in another way as well, Harry realised. His gaze was once again riveted on the monotonous falling snowflakes and his thoughts began to spin around his head as slowly a plan took shape. Although it was still a rather vague thought it was, however, the first time in months that his hopes of finding a way out rose again.

Sirius staggered and fell to his knees. His whole body was aching. Dazed he lifted his head and realised that he was at the graveyard. What on earth had happened? He had been hurled against some barrier. But how was that possible? Shakily he stood up and ran his

hand over his forehead. He had had enormous luck that he hadn't splinched himself. He knew that such a thing only happened when the place of destination was equipped with wards but the charms which had once surrounded Godric's Hollow had been destroyed ten years ago, hadn't they?

Something was very wrong and he was determined to discover what it was. He took a deep breath and this time he apparated a way off the house. Standing on the deserted street he stared at the high trees which blocked the house from view. He quickly noticed that the house was indeed surrounded by wards. He lifted his wand and about an hour later he finally managed to get through.

As Sirius Black stepped in the garden he stopped dead in his tracks. Dizziness overcame him and black dots danced in front of his eyes. Unbelievably he stared at the house which wasn't destroyed in the slightest. No, that couldn't be. Who on earth had done this? He stumbled, while trying to understand what had happened. Tightly clutching his wand he went slowly to the door and opened it. Surrounded by the light of his wand he entered and looked around carefully. On the floor lay a thin layer of dust. It seemed as if no one had been here for a long period of time.

But who had built Godric's Hollow up again? It should have been impossible. On tiptoe he stepped in direction of the living room. Then he leant against the door frame and shuddered while his heart began to pound painfully. He could see it in front of him; James and Lily sat on the soft thick blanket and watched how little Harry made his first attempts at walking; James and Lily who danced in the candle light shortly after their marriage. In this room they had told him that they expected a child and here they had asked him if he wanted to become Harry's godfather. His eyes burned as he went into the room.

He stepped on something and heard a rattling noise. Looking down he saw a photo frame. He bent down, picked it up and regarded it. He gasped and everything began to spin around him. He staggered to the settee and let himself fall while staring spellbound at the photo. That really wasn't possible. That couldn't be. But then he held his breath as he became aware of the fact that it was possible. They had

never found Harry's body in the ruins of Godric's Hollow after all. Could it really be true that his godson was alive?

He stared at the photo.

The raven-haired boy with the radiant emerald eyes was standing in the middle and looked so like James that he just couldn't be mistaken. Furthermore he had Lily's emerald eyes.

His gaze fell on the two children who were standing next to Harry. On his right side a black-haired girl was standing. To his left he could see a silver-blond boy who looked almost like a younger version of Lucius Malfoy. Sirius nodded lightly. He remembered Lucius Malfoy well. Malfoy had been a sixth year when he had begun his first year in Hogwarts and from the very beginning he hadn't been able to stand the arrogant boy. But what did Harry have to do with Malfoy's son?

Where was he now? What had happened to Harry ten years ago? As he remembered an Order meeting which had taken place long ago he slapped his hand against his forehead. *He was so blind.* As he connected the pieces he groaned, appalled. Voldemort had taken Harry. That's why they hadn't been able to find his body. That's why Harry was staring at him from this photo, together with Lucius' son and Bellatrix Lestranges' daughter.

Pained, he closed his eyes. Harry was Voldemort's heir. It couldn't have been more ironical. But when Harry had been here, did he know who he was? Did he know that Voldemort had murdered his parents? So many questions spun around his head, nevertheless he felt as if he could float on a cloud. Harry was alive! His little godson was alive! Grinning from ear to ear he clutched the photo to himself as if it was his greatest treasure. Slowly he stood up.

Could it be that Harry would return here? Somehow he had to send him a message, he had to meet Harry. He had to ensure however that Harry would really get it. Perhaps Snape....As he thought of Snape his eyes widened. Snape had to know it! He had seen Harry, had even tried to abduct him. At that time he had laughed at his old enemy but now he realized with painful intensity that he would have given anything for Severus to have managed to kidnap his godson so many months ago.

Why for god's sake hadn't he told them that the son of the Dark Lord was Harry? Or was he really so unbelievably blind that he hadn't seen it? Shaking his head he began to search through the other rooms. Perhaps Harry had left something else. As he didn't find anything additional he stepped into the garden and stared at the half moon which had appeared meanwhile in the sky.

"I vow that I'll bring Harry home, James, Lily. I'll bring Harry to safety. I'll take care of him, Lily. Don't worry, I'll never allow Harry to follow Voldemort!"

At the same time Hermione Granger was sitting in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, peering at the teacher's table and wondering where Sirius currently was. The Halloween feast had begun already a half hour ago and he still hadn't appeared. Shrugging her shoulders she turned again to her tasty chocolate cake, while her glance wandered over the artfully decorated hall.

The present head boy and girl had wanted to make a little enjoyment for everyone –despite everything that happened outside of Hogwarts – and had organized within a short time a real Halloween party. As her glance fell on Professor Snape she sighed. Every time he taught Potions she hated the subject, probably due to the fact that he only treated the Slytherins civilly to a degree.

However, since the sorting hat had put her in Gryffindor he was especially mean to her, Ron and Neville who had also landed in the same house. But when Professor Lennox was teaching Hermione loved Potions. It was really a downright shame that Alison wasn't always teaching. How Alison managed to have conversations with Snape was a complete mystery to Hermione. Suddenly she noticed that Remus rose with difficulty. He whispered something to Emily and hobbled towards the doors. The dull sound of his stick echoed through the hall. Hermione looked after him and flinched slightly.

She still hadn't got used to the sight of him. The injury which he had sustained fighting alongside the French resistance against the Dark Lord in one of the battles one and a half years ago would never heal again. Ever since then he taught Defence against the Dark Arts alone

and didn't share the position with Sirius, Charlotte and Emily anymore. Sadly she shook her head. That he couldn't fight any longer had hit him hard. The only one who had managed since then to charm a smile on his face had been little Meggie. Where did he only want to go and where was Sirius?

Remus Lupin stared, blinking in bewilderment, at his friend who had almost run him down with shining eyes and completely out of breath and who had told him a moment ago that Harry was alive.

"What?" he asked.

"I was in Godric's Hollow, Remus! And in the house I found a photo. Look at it!"

Sirius held it out to him and Remus, who still didn't understand anything, took it. As he viewed it, his jaw dropped.

„ It is true, Remus. Harry is alive. Voldemort has taken him. We'll have to do something by any means possible!"

Remus leant against the wand, he felt dizzy. A while later he looked at Sirius.

"We'll have to inform, Albus," he said shakily, while he still couldn't believe what he had discovered an instant ago. Again he gazed at the photo. It couldn't just be a coincidence. He looked too much like James. A radiant smile appeared on Remus' face. A moment later the two friends set off to the Great Hall and Sirius began to tell Remus in greater detail what had occurred that evening.

Charlotte Black reached absentmindedly for her glass and worried about Sirius. Hopefully nothing had happened to him. Each time when he was alone she was filled with a dreadful fear that he would fall into the Death Eaters hands. But Sirius hadn't wanted her company. As always when he went to the graveyard he wanted to be alone. Shaking her head she looked to her sister and asked:

“Why couldn’t they have gone together? In twos it is at least a bit safer.”

Emily shrugged her shoulders.

“They want to be alone with their mourning. Remus still blames himself for the death of his friends. Don’t worry, Charlotte, surely nothing will happen to them,” she replied tiredly and Charlotte noticed how exhausted her sister looked. Turning her head towards her plate her gaze fell suddenly on two figures who headed straight to the teacher’s table and smiling relief rushed through her as she recognized Sirius and Remus. Sirius went to Albus, bent down and, showing him something, he began to speak quietly.

Albus made an abrupt movement of his hand and his glass fell over, whose content soaked the table-cloth and Charlotte became more and more curious. Albus stood up and called the heads to him. After talking shortly with them he looked at those people who were sitting at the table,

“In ten minutes an Order meeting will be taking place,” he announced, turned around and left the hall, while Sirius stepped to Charlotte and gave her a kiss.

“Oh, Charlotte, I could embrace the whole world,” he murmured.

Smiling she looked up in his eyes.

“Why? What happened?”

„You’ll hear it soon,” he answered grinning from ear to ear and obviously he refused to satisfy her curiosity.

“Dad!” The three-year old Jamie called out of his highchair and Sirius picked him up and whirled him around laughing. Then he hugged his son to himself and whispered:

“Soon you’ll have not only a big sister but also a big brother, Jamie.”

Charlotte blinked uncomprehendingly and was just about to ask Sirius what he meant with that strange remark when she noticed out of the

corner of her eye her sister stand up from the table and stagger slightly.

“Emily!”

Emily clung to Charlotte for a moment and shook her head.

“It’s alright again. I was only a bit dizzy.”

“Emily, love, you should rest. Come,” Remus said worriedly while taking little Meggie in his arms.

Emily nodded and asked, looking at her sister:

“Shall I take Jamie along?”

As Remus and Emily left with the two children, Charlotte sighed. She could really not say that her life was boring. To all her worries and fears she now had to add her worry over her sister whose pregnancy was bothering her greatly.

As her bracelet gave a soft trill she looked at Sirius.

“We should go.”

He nodded in approval and shortly afterwards they left the hall while Charlotte’s gaze still searched for Hermione and winked quickly at the girl. Silently they walked along the corridors and a while later they reached Albus’ office, in which a variety of members of the Order had already gathered. Charlotte sat next to Alison and quietly asked after Severus,

“He wanted to look after a potion,” she replied while turning her eyes skywards. “Do you know what happened? As I delivered Lizzie to Emily I hardly recognised Remus. His eyes were actually shining.”

Charlotte shook her head regretfully.

“No, Sirius didn’t want to tell me. But if he and Remus are so happy about it, it can’t be bad for a change,” Charlotte reasoned and gazed to Albus who was regarding a photo with twinkling eyes.

Remus Lupin who had just entered the room waved at them and Charlotte gave him a smile. Charlotte eyed Remus and had to admit that Alison was right.

She hadn't seen her brother-in-law so happy for months. As the door opened and Severus, enveloped in a dark cloak, appeared Sirius jumped up and seized the newcomer at the collar and screamed,

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"Let go of me immediately, Black. I've not the faintest idea..."

"Sirius, let go of Severus and sit down. We want to begin," commanded Albus Dumbledore with a firm voice and Sirius, after casting Severus a not exactly friendly gaze, reluctantly took a seat. Albus smiled at all those present and said,

„I've called the today's meeting as Sirius has made an almost unbelievable discovery a while earlier. Sirius apparated to Godric's Hollow and to his greatest surprise he found this photo there."

Albus handed it Minerva who took it and shortly afterwards she gave a scream.

"Albus! That..." she stared at Albus and as he nodded beaming, she said,

"But how...? Is it really him?"

The photo was handed along and as Charlotte looked at it, she immediately recognized the boy, though she didn't understand why Sirius, Remus, Albus and Minerva seemed to be so very happy about a picture of Voldemort's son.

"That's Harry, Charlotte!" Sirius said and the photos of the Potters came into her mind. Confused she gave the photo to Alison while looking at Sirius' laughing face. As Severus was holding the picture in his hand the leader of the Order of the Phoenix asked with a smile,

"So this is Voldemort's son, Severus?"

He nodded clueless and Sirius banged his fist on the table.

“For god’s sake, Snape! Are you blind? That’s Harry, James’ and Lily’s son! Voldemort must have taken him along then!”

Severus eye’s widened while Minerva gasped for air.

“But why are you so sure that this is not Voldemort’s son?” Alison asked.

Sirius leaned forwards.

“Because now everything makes sense! We’ve never found Harry and he looks the same as James, only his eyes are Lily’s. The age is also right. Such a great similarity just can’t be an accident. Apart from this, Harry was in Godric’s Hollow and has built it up again and only a Potter could have done this. So I assume he knows who he is, although I can’t understand why Voldemort would have told him. Anyway we have to free him from Voldemort’s clutches by any means.”

“The question is only how.” Albus threw in and looked at an ocean of helpless faces. Frowning, the headmaster of Hogwarts continued:

“Apart from this I worry more about the fact that Severus hasn’t seen the children for months.”

Sirius felt fear rise in him. That he had completely forgotten! Two months after Snape had told them that the raven-haired boy was Voldemort’s son; Albus had wanted to know if he had made any progress in drawing the boy to their side. The spy had given the surprising answer that he hadn’t seen the boy for weeks, nor the other children. Sirius remembered he had been too worried over Remus to be able to listen attentively in the Order assemblies.

“You haven’t seen him since then?” he asked unbelievably.

Severus shook his head with a sour expression.

“No. The last what I heard from him was when he sent me a letter and demanded me to send him a vial of Veritaserum. That was, however, one and a half years ago.”

“But they just can’t have disappeared into thin air!” Sirius protested.

“Apparently, they have,” Severus replied unmoved.

“And what shall we do now?”

Albus Dumbledore sighed heavily.

“I don’t know. I don’t know, Sirius.”

Chapter 23

August 1992

Harry swung himself rather clumsily into the air and made an effort to move his wings. It was an incredible feeling as he had got used to it a bit. But since the room was by far too narrow, he shortly afterwards landed on the ground and began to concentrate. As he had changed back, he heard enthusiastically clapping and looking up, he saw Caro and Draco standing in front of him with beaming faces. Peter nodded meanwhile,

“Well done, Harry,” he said and Harry couldn’t help grinning while dropping exhausted into one of the armchairs.

Since the idea had occurred to him last November, Peter had tried to teach them how to become Animagi and now he had finally managed it. Caro handed him a glass of water.

“So, now only we have to manage it still,” she said.

Drinking his water, he watched his friends practising with Peter and he shook his head. Recently he forgot over and over again that this man was to blame for the death of his parents. But he had helped them and Harry knew that he would never have managed it so quickly to become an Animagus without his help. Occasionally he even spied. So far he hadn’t found out something worth mentioning but at least Peter kept them up to date about what happened outside in the world.

He could have betrayed them; he hadn’t done it however, although this probably was linked to the fact that Peter was greatly afraid of the Dark Lord and he liked it better to stay with them as to be a Death Eater and to expose himself continuously to some dangers. As a trilling startled him, he ran smiling to the window moments afterwards. Rainbow flew inside and Harry halted suddenly. If Rainbow could break through the magical barrier on his windows, wouldn’t he then be able to do it as well in his Animagi form? He changed into a phoenix as well after all, more precisely said in a phoenix, whose feathers shimmered emerald and golden. He found his form fantastically.

Furthermore he had finally discovered the reason why he was able to speak with Rainbow and could understand her. It just had to be because of his Animagus form. Well, he would occupy himself with this later. He took the letter from Rainbow and opened it. It was from his godfather as he recognized instantly by the handwriting.

Harry remembered still very well how surprised he had been as an owl had flown up and down in front of his window, with a letter tied to one of her legs. Since the owl hadn't been able to get through the magical barrier, Rainbow had finally brought him the letter. The letter had been from his godfather and for one moment he had only stared onto the letter in his hand, incapable of moving. Harry had not known how to feel, when he had read then that the entire Order of the Phoenix was aware of his true identity. But since the letter had sounded so imploringly however, he had finally written back. His godfather had not only written him tips ever since, which concerned his change to an Animagus, but had also sent him a huge number of books, in which he had looked for the charm that clung on his door and his windows.

So far he hadn't had any success however and slowly Harry suspected that it had to be a Parsel- charm. As he had told his godfather about the problem with Nell however he had received a little, black and rather old book a few weeks later and had indeed found a charm in there, how he could bind Nell to himself. But so far he hadn't performed this complicated charm. He riveted his eyes on the lineated parchment. Before he could read the letter however, he suddenly heard a hiss. Looking down, he saw Diamond,

"He's coming. He's coming."

Harry flinched, jumped up and stuffed the letter in one of his pockets.

"Peter, change back and disappear! Caro, Draco, fetch your books! Someone is coming!"

No moment too early, the three had managed to sit down at the table with flying breath and to bend over their books, when the door opened and the Dark Lord stepped into the room:

"Harry, would you accompany me for a short walk?"

Harry nearly dropped his quill, when casting a glance at Caro and Draco, who looked at him anxiously. Harry nodded finally and stepped out of his chambers. Silently he followed the Dark Lord. When they entered the park, Harry raised his head towards the sun and inhaled the air so deeply as possible. It was over two years ago that he had been outside for the last time. They walked along one of the ways and Harry felt how he became more and more nervous.

"I have left you alone the last two years, Harry. But now it's slowly time that you decide what you want."

The Dark Lord halted and lifted Harry's chin.

"Do you want to help me now to rule the world? And to become my successor one day?"

Harry stared into the red eyes and knew that he didn't want to discover how the reaction of his adoptive father would turn out, should he refuse. Furthermore he remembered Draco's warning. It had been only yesterday that Draco had told him that he had been held back by his father shortly after their daily lessons.

"Draco. It doesn't matter to me how but see to it that Harry tells our master that he wants to learn to torture and to kill. Convince him of this. It is important. Very important. Do you understand? Promise me," Lucius Malfoy had beseeched his son.

Peter also had told him alarming news yesterday. He had listened to a conversation between Lucius and Voldemort in his Animagus form as a rat.

"It is really necessary, My Lord?"

"Lucius. We will see. I'll speak with Harry soon and then we'll see whether he have to put our plan into action, or not."

So Harry heard himself say, as he opened his mouth,

„ Yes, and I'm sorry that I ran away then. Will you teach me how to torture and to kill? I want to learn it.“

As a hardly noticeable smile darted over the white face of his adoptive father, Harry knew that he had to flee as fast as possible.

"Tomorrow your lessons will start, Harry."

"I'm looking forward to them," Harry replied, hoping that his voice didn't tremble while asking himself what on earth had brought him to tell his adoptive father that he *wanted* to become his successor.

Hermione hurried along the broad corridor while going through the places in her mind where the little rascals could have hid. As much as she loved Jamie and Lizzie, sometimes the two got considerably on her nerves

To look after the four year old children was an undertaking on which everyone failed, unless he would tie them magically to his hand. They escaped from everyone and to find them again was more difficult as to search for a needle in a haystack.

"Did you find them?"

Hermione lifted her head and saw Ginny running towards her, whose red hair was shimmering in the sunlight which streamed through the windows.

"No, and slowly I give it up," she answered.

"I should tell you by the way that Fred and George want to speak with you. They said they would know a way to find Jamie and Lizzie."

Hermione raised sceptically an eyebrow.

"How do they want to manage that?"

But finally the two girls set off to the common room. On their way they ran into Ron and Neville who as well hadn't been successful in finding the little runaways.

"Why do we actually have to watch them always?" Ron asked gruffly, as they climbed up one of the many stairs in Hogwarts.

„ Because we have holidays and have nothing better to do and now finally stop grumbling, Ron. You had better think where they could be,” his sister said.

Arriving in the common room of the Gryffindors, they met Fred and George, who faced them with amusing expressions. One of the red-haired Weasley twins said,

“If you look for Lizzie and Jamie, they are on the Quidditch field.”

“And how do you know that?” Hermione asked.

“That’s really simple. It’s written on my map,” Fred explained and held Hermione unceremoniously a parchment under her nose.

Hermione’s eyes widened.

„ That’s just fantastically. Wherefrom do you have it?”

“We’ve found it in the Shrieking Shack But we didn’t know what to do with it...” Fred said.

“...wanted to throw it away already but then we ran into Jamie’s Dad and he seemed to know the map and even

told us how it functioned,” George finished the sentence.

“Jamie, Lizzie! Oh, no, they ‘re going towards the Forbidden Forest!” Hermione shouted.

She snatched the map, spun around and sprinted away, Ginny followed her.

Fred and George looked at each other and run behind them.

“Hey, Hermione! That’s our map!”

In the meantime Ron looked at Neville and asked,

“Do you want to play chess?”

"And what shall we do now?" Caro asked as she stared at Harry who had just informed them what his adoptive father had said to him and above all what he had replied to it.

"We have to flee!" Harry continued frantically und looked at his friends.

"The only question is how. We've still not found the charm which is keeping us here. In my Animagus form I could fly through the barrier but you two can't."

One moment they sat silently, while everyone was brooding.

"Harry, do you remember how you and Draco quarrelled so terrible? You've broken the window then. Perhaps you're able to break through the barrier as well. Do you think that would be somehow possible?" Caro asked with a hopeful face.

Harry stared at Caro. Her idea seemed totally crazy to him but as he thought of his ability to perform magic without a wand, which had even increased in the past two years, hope rose in him, too. It could function. It was worth a try after all.

„I'll try," he said and stood up.

He marched to the window, halted in front of it and took a deep breath. He raised his hands, closed his eyes and tried to find his magic. Somehow he felt silly how he was standing there. A little later he sensed the magic which kept them prisoner and he thought of having to torture soon and began to persuade himself that he was angry, furious and forced himself to scream silently out his anger. He remembered his parents, Godric's Hollow, the spiders and Nell.

He began to feel his magic which whirled around him. What should he do now? Then he let go off his magic and threw it with all his power against the barrier of the window. Dizziness rushed over him, black dots danced in front of his eyes and he began to fall. From wide afar he heard someone calling his name. But there he already sank into complete darkness.

“Harry!” Caro shouted and dropped next to Harry to her knees. “Caro shouted and dropped next to Harry to her knees.

Draco as well sank to the ground and swallowed.

“He’s alive,” Caro said one moment later and Draco felt how boundless relief filled him. For one instant he had believed that Harry would be dead. It had been scaring and incredibly how Harry had been suddenly surrounded with golden blinding magic.

“Draco, he’s glowing. What shall we do now?”

Draco stood up.

“He has managed it,” The silver-blond boy said with a surprised expression as he stretched his hand through the window.

Draco stared at his friend who was lying on the floor and began to think sharply. His eyes fell on Rainbow who was cuddling her head to Harry’s chest and trilling softly and on Peter who was standing with shocked face in the door.

“Caro, we have to hurry. Harry will be alright again. He has obviously magically overexerted himself once again, like in the fight in Diagon Alley,” he said comfortingly while laying a hand on Caro’s shoulder.

Caro nodded pale and stood shakily up.

“What’s actually going on here?” Peter dared to ask.

“We’ll escape,” Draco explained shortly.

A little while later Caro and Draco had packed everything and had stowed away Peter safely in his wooden box as Caro, sighing, picked Diamond up and put the hissing snake quickly on Harry’s arm.

Then she looked at Draco,

“We’ll have to take Nell with us. Harry would never forgive us if we would let her here.”

Draco stared at her.

“And how on earth shall we manage this?”

Caro didn't answer but bent rashly over the tied up bundle in which Harry's letters, which he had received from his godfather, were contained. Draco knew for what Caro searched and felt the sudden urge to snatch all letters out of her hand. He hadn't liked it and didn't like it still that Harry was writing letters with their enemies.

They had quarrelled over it. Caro had been of course on Harry's side as he hadn't expected it otherwise.

She had said that this Black was Harry's godfather after all, though she had said it rather hesitatingly. He knew that Caro was at heart as well against it, she only hadn't wanted to hurt Harry. And this Black had indeed written, no, implored that Harry should escape. Draco shook his head. He could only hope that Harry hadn't given away too much to Black. It was good that Harry had promised solemnly that he under no circumstances would write something that would grant Dumbledore and the Order by any chance an advantage in the war, as for example the secret passage way.

Draco didn't know what he would have done in this case. In this respect Caro had agreed with him for once. He had toyed with the idea of telling his father that Harry was writing to Black but at the same time he hadn't wanted to betray Harry. They hadn't spoken to each other for two days until Harry had assured him that he wouldn't give anything away in his letters. Who knows what the Order would have done with the information which Peter had dragged along bit by bit in the last months. Draco thought of his parents and sighed. He would have loved to know what the adults were planning or better said what the Dark Lord was planning. Draco knew that only an order of his master could have kept his father from punishing him then.

But he knew that it couldn't be anything pleasant. Like Harry he didn't want to find out what it was. Perhaps he could have become a Death Eater but it bothered him that he would be only a weak-willed puppet then. Furthermore he hadn't forgotten how it had been to watch these tortures and reluctantly he admitted to himself that unjustified cruelties weren't necessary and even if, he didn't want to be forced to follow orders, he didn't want to carry out.

“I’ve found it!”

Caro’s voice jolted him back into reality and he looked at her. She bit her lips and sighed. Then she met his eyes.

“We need the blood of the Dark Lord,” she said softly.

“Just great. That’s of course no problem at all,” he replied sarcastically.

Caro looked angrily at him and fetched Peter. As he had changed a moment later and Caro had said what she wanted, he shook his head while slowly stepping back.

“This I can’t do. That is much too dangerous.”

“You have to! We can’t leave the room, Peter.”

Draco who had become more and more impatient in the meantime – they had to leave the castle as soon as possible – that was all what they needed that someone still caught them and so he raised his wand.

“Imperio!”

After Peter had changed and had disappeared behind the cupboards, Caro knelt down to Harry once more.

“Thank you, Draco. Hopefully nothing will happen to Peter and he’ll manage it. Otherwise I don’t know what we shall do.”

“He’s still glowing,” she added worriedly.

Draco meanwhile banged his fist into the table. It was unbelievable. Now they had to wait as well for Peter’s safe return. It lasted long. Draco was shortly before losing his nerves as Peter finally appeared. He changed and held with expressionless face a blood-stained paper tissue out to them. Caro jumped up, took it and a while later she started together with Harry’s and Nell’s blood to perform the charm while Draco lifted the curse from Peter.

Then he stepped impatiently to the window, inhaled the fresh air and began to wait for Caro having finally finished. A few minutes later, which had seemed to Draco like an eternity, she rose, ran a hand across her forehead and sat down. Her face was pale. While Nell was bending worriedly over Harry, Draco brought Caro a glass of water. To charm had obviously strained her. With a grateful look, she began to drink slowly.

"Where we shall go to, by the way?"

Caro raised one eyebrow.

"To Hogwarts. Where else should we go?"

Shocked Draco stared at his friend,

"You want to go to Hogwarts?"

Caro returned his look unmoving.

"Yes. That's the only possibility, which is left to us or do you want to live on the street?"

"You want to go to Dumbledore? Those are our enemies, Caro!"

"I know that. But for the time being we have to go there. Harry would break some day, Draco, if he would be forced to torture and to kill. Furthermore, don't forget what you have seen, before we've gone to Godric's Hollow. I as well do not necessarily want to obey orders which demand from me to kill people which have never done anything to me, although I probably wouldn't mind it much but now this isn't a possibility anymore anyway. Furthermore it may be so that my mother possesses power but in the end she must submit to all the Dark Lord's orders and I don't think that I could do it; not anymore."

Draco sighed.

"Everything was so easy when we were still little. Then I've never thought about what it is right or what isn't. I just knew it."

Casting one glance at Harry, he continued,

„I wonder what would have happen if we never had met Harry.”

“Probably we would be now obedient Death Eaters who would blindly obey every order,” Caro said and shrugged with her shoulders.

„ Don’t make such a face. If the thought will cheer you up, don’t forget that we can spy in Hogwarts and I will try to find out who murdered my father,” The black-haired girl replied and a hard, cold expression entered her dark eyes.

“And now help me to charm the things,” she added and stood up while it seemed that Draco had been left speechless.

Sirius Black blinked sleepily while watching how Hermione, Ginny, Ron and Neville took great pains to teach Jamie and Lizzie flying and to get them to follow their instructions and in the first place to get them to listen to them at all. Since Jamies and Lizzies brooms were hovering only one metre above the ground, he wasn’t worried very much about his son, though, if he could have decided it Jamie would have got a real broom but Charlotte hadn’t wanted to allow it, as well as Alison.

Sirius pushed his chair a bit further to the right so that he had a better view on the Quidditch field and reached for a piece of cake which was decorated with birthday candles. Though Emily hadn’t wanted to celebrate her birthday in the beginning, Charlotte and Alison had persuaded her to do it in the end, since they had had only little joy in the last time. Voldemort and his followers raged more terrible than ever and there wasn’t the tiniest chance to stop him somehow and to cap it all his godson was in Voldemort’s hands, of all people. Absent-minded Sirius chewed on his cake and thought once again of Harry. As he had discovered that his godson was alive last year and had informed the Order of the Phoenix of this, the Order had been at a loss how to act. There had been many suggestions but one had been more senseless than the other.

As Albus had remarked correctly then, they hadn’t known anything at all. Did Harry know who he was or had Voldemort told him lies? Plans to rescue Harry they had quickly abandoned again since it was just impossible to attack Voldemort’s headquarter. Sirius’ idea to write a

letter had been rejected by Albus. First it could get Harry into danger, Albus had said and second they could actually assume that Harry was on Voldemort's side, despite the fact that he had let Snape escape. In the end the meeting had ended with Albus assigning Snape to try at all events to find out something about the whereabouts of the children. Sirius had been deeply disappointed; he wanted to free Harry from Voldemort's control and at the same evening he had sent a letter to Harry.

A letter in which he had written who he was and who Harry was. Of Voldemort he had written nothing. After all no one could know which feelings Harry showed for the Dark Lord, although the thought that Harry loved Voldemort was unbearable for Sirius. With a plea to write him back, he had given the letter to his owl. The next days had past agonizingly slow while he had waited. After one week he had wanted to send a second letter but then Harry's answer had finally come, delivered by a magnificent black shining phoenix which had put him into awed amazement for a moment.

The letter had been short, only a few lines but those had had a meaning for him which no one could ever imagine. Harry had thanked him for his letter and written that he knew who he was. That had been everything but Sirius had been overjoyed. Harry had answered him and that was the only thing that counted.

Sirius had told it Remus, both happy that Harry had answered. The fact that Snape had not seen the children for months had worried them extremely since they had discovered who Voldemort's son was. Albus had urged them to be careful but he had also been relieved that Harry had written back; even if the Order had not planned it initially. In the following months Sirius wrote Harry many letters and told him about the life in Hogwarts, of the past, of Lily and James and wrote about his family. Harry wrote back but to his careful questions which Sirius asked in his letters he never received any answer. So that he still didn't know which relationship Harry had with Voldemort or how Harry had discovered who he was.

Harry had told him of his intention to become an Animagus, how he had found his phoenix Rainbow and how he played Quidditch with his friends or better said such a similar game. Once Harry had written

how he and his friends had sneaked out of the castle and eaten ice-cream in Diagon Alley. As he had read that there was obviously a way out of the castle after all, without, as Harry's letter had indicated this to be seen, he hadn't been able to suppress a triumphing smile.

His suggestion to meet in Diagon Alley Harry had however ignored and Sirius had already feared that he had made an irreparable mistake. But to his great relief Harry hadn't stopped to answer his letters more or less.

Sirius sighed while asking himself how it should go on with Harry. He wanted to free his godson as quick as possible from Voldemort's headquarter but he hadn't the faintest idea how to do this and Harry himself obviously did not want to know anything about a possibility to live here with him in Hogwarts. So Sirius could only hope that Harry was alright. Nevertheless he was worried. As Harry had asked him if there was a way to free a house-elf from its owner's control and had written him that it was urgent, he had been astonished and surprised. But he had seen a chance as well to become closer to Harry.

After some rummaging around he had found a suitable charm. He had hesitated since this charm belonged definitely to the Dark Magic but in the end he had written Harry this. He hadn't wanted to disappoint his godson, glad that Harry had asked for his help. Sirius ate his cake and comforted himself once more that Harry didn't sound like a convinced Death Eater, at least according to his letters. Sirius looked over to his wife who sat closest to the fruit tart and just wanted to ask for a second piece as his eyes fell on a phoenix who was flying majestically towards him. It was Harry's phoenix and he smiled, happy to hear something again of his godchild. But as he held the letter in his hands a few moments later and saw the totally unknown handwriting, he froze.

Mr. Black,

Please come as fast as possible to the Shrieking Shack. Harry needs you..

Caro und Draco

He jumped up so quickly that his chair knocked over but he didn't pay any attention to this, neither to his wife's calling. He also didn't notice that the letter he wanted to stuff in one of his pockets slipped out of his hands and was carried away by the wind as he rushed like the devil across the grounds of Hogwarts.

How the children had only managed to land themselves in the Shrieking Shack. But why had Harry not written himself to him? Had something happen to him? The fear nearly suffocated him as he ran as fast as he could. Finally arriving at the wards which surrounded Hogwarts, he lifted his bracelet which allowed him to go through and apparated to the Shrieking Shack. Reaching his destination, he ran straight into the shack and came to an abrupt halt as he pushed the door open.

"Harry!" he gasped as his eyes fell on the unconscious boy who was lying on the ground. The black-haired girl looked up.

„We can't wake him," she said in a coolly voice.

Sirius bent down and felt how the most different emotions overcame him as he saw his godson again for the first time for years.

.He picked him up and was shocked about the heat which was radiating from him.

"Come," he said to the two children who regarded him with emotionless faces and hurried out.

Ginny smiled about the eagerness with which Jamie and Lizzie followed the instructions which Hermione and Ron gave them and remembered how it had been as her brother Charlie had taught her to fly years ago.

She also had wanted to learn flying by all means. Brushing a dark red strand of hair out of her face she turned around and wanted to go to the table since she had got hungry for a piece of cake in the meantime. She halted however as he eyes fell on Sirius who ran towards the castle. Surprised she saw that he was carrying someone in his arms. Two children followed him.

“Who that might be?”

“Who?”

Hearing Hermione’s voice, she realized that she had spoken aloud.

“There,” she said and pointed towards the figures who more and more went away. Hermione squinted.

“That’s Sirius!”

„Perhaps something has happen. Remus seems to have it rather hurriedly as well.” Ginny remarked, whose gaze was riveted on her teacher who was limping over the green grass. In his hand he seemed to hold a piece of paper. Hermione frowned and one moment later the two girls ran behind Remus. Catching up with Remus a short time later, Hermione asked,

“What has happened, Remus?”

“I don’t know,” Remus answered and shook his head. His face looked tensed. Taking the path to the hospital wing, Remus cursed his slowness. Could it really have been Harry whom Sirius had carried in his arms?

The letter which Sirius had lost suggested this. Wavering between hope and fear that it had not been Harry, he forced his crippled leg upstairs. Stepping into the hospital wing he felt how his heart began to thud in his chest as he approached Sirius and Poppy who bent over a raven-haired boy. Remus held his breath. Tears welled up in his eyes. He looked so much like James! Remus was so absorbed in regarding Harry that he almost didn’t hear what Poppy said,

„ In the moment I can’t do anything for him. I think rest and sleep would be currently best for him.”

Sirius nodded, picked Harry up and paused abruptly as he faced Remus. With beaming eyes, he whispered,

“Remus...”

Remus reached out with his hand and stroke over Harry's forehead. A movement drew his gaze to a black-haired girl who had come nearer and studied him with cold eyes. All of a sudden he became also aware of the presence of the silver-blond boy and as well of Hermione's and Ginny's. He stared at Sirius, stepped closely to Sirius and murmured,

"We have to inform Albus as soon as possible. This development of the events could bring consequences with it.

We should also maintain silence on the happening as so long as we haven't spoken to Albus."

Fortunately Sirius understood immediately. How much his friend had changed, Remus thought sadly. There had been a time where Sirius would have swept aside his worries and warnings. But now he nodded,

"Will you tell Albus? And take Hermione and Ginny with you. I'll take care of Harry and..."

Sirius' voice died away and not waiting for Remus' reaction, he started to move and hurried along the corridor, Harry's friends in tow. Remus cast a glance at Hermione and Ginny, who looked both confused and rather clueless and went into the opposite direction while saying to the girls,

"Go back to the Quidditch field."

"But who were they?" Hermione asked and hopped alongside him.

"Later, Hermione. Later you will hear everything."

After Sirius had bundled Harry and his two friends into a room, had ordered a house-elf to bring a bite to eat and had laid Harry on the bed, he stared at his godson. He felt his heart clenching. He looked so like James, he thought, just as Remus had a little time ago. How proud James would have been if he would have been able to see his son now. Sirius' bracelet trilled and he cast a last glance at Harry and went to the door.

“Good Night,” he said to Caro and Draco who had watched him continually with emotionless faces.

While hurrying to Albus’ office he wondered what on earth had happened that Harry had so overexerted himself magically. He must have used up an enormous amount of magic, so what had only happened? Of Caro and that Malfoy boy he hadn’t got out anything. Hopefully Harry would feel better tomorrow; then he would finally be able to speak with his godchild. When he entered Albus’ office a short while later, he saw that the closest confidants of Albus had already gathered. Quickly he went to his seat and sat down.

It felt to Harry that he was swimming through a dark ocean which seemed to crush him. Gradually it became brighter and blinking he opened his eyes. For one moment he stared confused at the white ceiling, then he suddenly remembered what had happened and abruptly he sat up. Dizziness overcame him and an agonizing pain shot through his head. With watering eyes he sank back into his pillow. The pain diminished and as he sat up a second time, he did it very slowly.

He recognized immediately that he wasn’t lying in his own bed. His eyes fell on the beds next to him and he calmed down. Caro and Draco still slept and Harry began to assume that they were in Hogwarts. He gazed down at Diamond and stroked her shortly. Out of the corner of his eyes he spotted something lying on the ground.

“Nell!” he shouted.

With his exclamation he woke up not only Nell but Draco and Caro as well who sat up half-asleep.

“Harry! You’re awake!”

Caro jumped out of her bed, ran to him and hugged him tightly.

“It’s alright, Caro. I’m fine,” he said embarrassed and freed himself of Caro’s embrace while noticing how he flushed.

“What actually happened? We’re in Hogwarts, aren’t we?”

“Yes, though it’s unbelievable, but we’re indeed in Hogwarts,” Draco answered gloomily.

“But what happened with Nell?”

Caro shook her head.

“Don’t worry, Harry. Nell is in safety,” she said and begun to tell Harry everything what had happened.

“We have insisted that we get one room. That’s why it’s a bit narrow here. But your godfather has said that we could enlarge it magically. He was all excited by the way as he had seen you and brought you immediately to the hospital wing. But the nurse was obviously clueless and said it would be the best to wait. You worried us pretty much, you’ve really glowed.”

Harry threw the blanket aside and wanted to get up, only to sink immediately again on the bed.

“Harry? What’s wrong?”

„I only feel dizzy. I think I should stay in bed, at least today,” Harry said weakly whose head began to hurt again.

Caro just wanted to say something when they heard a softly tapping. The door opened and a black-haired tall man stepped in. His blue eyes were shining as he went towards Harry.

“Harry,” he said in a husky voice and Harry recognized him at once, it was his godfather Sirius Black.

Chapter 24

Harry cast a sidelong glance at Sirius and wondered when his godfather would finally muster up his courage to tell him whatever he was having on his mind. In the meantime they had already walked round the half lake, without one of them having spoken a word. Seeing a bench Harry broke the silence and asked if they couldn't sit down for a while. The short walk had exhausted him. Still he hadn't recovered from his magical overexertion, although he was feeling much better now than yesterday where he hadn't been able to stand up from his bed.

"Of course, Harry. Forgive my thoughtlessness."

Sirius gazed at him worriedly.

"Shall we go back to the castle? You're looking pale."

"No, it's alright," Harry replied and sat down on the little bench.

"Why did you want to speak with me now?" he asked finally since Sirius still did not seem to make any move to reveal to him the reason why he had requested this walk.

He heard how Sirius took a deep breath and hoped that his godfather wouldn't ask him something that he didn't want to answer.

"Harry, there are a few things which I wanted to discuss with you. But it's difficult for me since I hardly know where to begin. Why did you flee, Harry? Did Voldemort hurt you in some way? And what happened in the last months? Why didn't you attend any Death Eater meetings anymore?"

Harry riveted his eyes on the, in the sun light, glistening water of the lake and thought about it. For a moment he was surprised that Sirius knew that he hadn't been at any Death Eater meeting anymore. Then he remembered Snape. The spy must have kept the Order of the Phoenix informed. But to explain to Sirius the exact reason for his escape meant to tell him everything what had happened in the years since the Dark Lord had murdered his parents and taken him along. This he however didn't want. For that he still didn't know his godfather

good enough. The thought to trust Sirius to the same extent as his friends caused him to feel uneasy.

"I don't want to talk about it. Perhaps sometime later," he mumbled.

Sirius sighed silently. It pained him deeply that Harry obviously didn't trust him. He took care however not to press Harry. He hadn't forgotten yet how much fear he had felt as he had believed to have lost Harry with his question to meet in Diagon Alley. The most important thing was that Harry was in Hogwarts and in time Harry would hopefully learn to trust him and tell him one day how his childhood had been like.

Sirius looked at Harry and said with unsteady voice,

"Harry, I am so incredibly sorry that I didn't become the secret keeper of your parents and so I'm to blame for their death. I wish I would have made another decision. Then you would have grown up with your parents and..."

Sirius broke off and tried to read in the emerald eyes but he couldn't.

"Could I undo my decision I would do it immediately, Harry, please believe me. I don't know if you can ever forgive me..."

Harry saw the pain in the eyes of his godfather and nodded. If he wasn't able to hate Voldemort for murdering his parents and Peter for betraying his parents, how should he then hate Sirius? The thought of Peter caused him to ask however,

"If you would meet Peter, what would you do?"

Sirius stared at him surprised.

"What I would do...I would kill him. He has betrayed your parents, he has betrayed us all," he replied calmly and Harry saw that he was serious. All of a sudden Harry remembered what Caro had once said as he had quarrelled with Draco because of his parents: 'That the members of the Order tortured and killed as well and that his parents had certainly killed, too.'

But if it was so, then what was the difference between Dumbledore's Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters of his adoptive father? Sirius didn't know anything of Peter and how it looked like he wouldn't tell him anything about Peter's existence; at least for the time being. Sirius' voice interrupted his thoughts.

„Albus said by the way that it would be the best if we would pass you off as my nephew. Since you are considered to be dead it would raise too much questions if you would suddenly appear out of nowhere. Furthermore we can thus prevent that Voldemort will discover that you are here. So you'll say that you are Harry Black and that your parents were murdered not long ago.”

“What about Caro and Draco?”

“Well, Caro we can pass off as my niece. She could share a room with Hermione; at least as long as school will start again. Hermione is my adoptive daughter. You'll get to know her soon. As far as Draco is concerned, we have thought that he could pose as one of Alison's relatives. Alison teaches Potions. But apart from that she has blond hair and if we would pass Draco off as my relative it would surely attract attention. And your presence shall attract attention as little as possible. In two weeks you will then divided into your houses and will go to school, like everyone else.”

For one moment Harry wondered if he would ever be able to use his real name. So he would have a false identity in Hogwarts, too. How ironical. Harry's thoughts wandered on to his adoptive father. In the meantime their disappearance had been surely noticed. Certainly his adoptive father had been angry. Would he suspect that they had fled to Hogwarts?

“Come; let's go back to the castle. It's time that you get to know everyone. Furthermore we have to tell your friends that they are under no circumstances to introduce themselves with their real names if someone asks them,” Sirius said and stood up.

Harry followed and dwelled on his thoughts. He foresaw difficulties. Draco wouldn't be very pleased to hear that it was expected from him to pose as the relative of the teacher of Potions, if he would agree to this at all. As for Caro he didn't believe that she would ever say that

her parents had been murdered by – as Sirius had said it – Death Eaters if it was just the other way round in reality and her father had been murdered by the Order of Phoenix.

On top of that they had to keep Peter hidden. Soon they would have lessons but Harry knew that his friends and he had much more knowledge than the Hogwarts students and that it would be rather unlikely that he didn't know the material of the second class already. All of a sudden he realized as well that his godfather and the other adults would surely not allow it if he would take some of his books and learn charms which belonged to Dark Magic.

Painfully he longed back to Godric's Hollow. But the one week had been probably all what he would ever get of freedom, Harry thought gloomily and felt how anger rose in him. Here in Hogwarts he would be able to decide just as little as in his adoptive father's castle. Sirius hadn't even asked him if he agreed to posing as Sirius' nephew. How he hated this helplessness. With a shudder he thought back how he had fainted as he had broken the curses on their windows. Why had this happen? What was the use of it if he was able to perform magic without a wand if he lost his consciousness shortly afterwards? At this time he would have been able neither to defend himself nor to catch what happened around him. He had been completely helpless.

Though he had been able to trust Caro and Draco but what if something had happen? What if Caro hadn't succeeded in freeing Nell out of Voldemort's possession? In the end Caro and Draco would have escaped without Nell since the little house-elf didn't mean nearly the same to them as to him and he would have been totally powerless against it. But how could he prevent that he overexerted himself magically? In Diagon Alley it had happen to him although he had used his wand, but then the after-effects had certainly not been as bad as now. He remembered the power he had felt.

If he would manage to use only a little part, then he would be perhaps able to avoid sinking into unconsciousness. His adoptive father would have been able to help him but probably he would have presented him full of anticipation a plan shortly afterwards how they could together conquer the world. Voldemort only wanted to use me, he had said so himself, Harry thought and suddenly realized that this

thought incredibly hurt. But what was that supposed to mean? He had wanted to flee after all, so why he racked his brains now over Voldemort's feelings towards him?

Harry shook fiercely his head as he slowly realized that he had run away because he hadn't had the power to oppose his adoptive father. Only his fear of what Voldemort would do had brought him to destroy the curses on his windows. His adoptive father would have surely not let himself be locked up for one and a half year. Harry riveted his eyes on the enormous castle and decided to wait first. Somehow I have to try under all circumstances to solve my problem with my magic and this as soon as possible he vowed, while walking with Sirius across the grounds.

A little later they had reached the room where Caro and Darco were waiting. After Sirius had told Caro and Draco what Albus Dumbledore thought for the best, Harry saw how anger crept into the faces of his friends. The subtle change had been unnoticed by Sirius however and while he interpreted their silence as agreement and cheerfully asked them to pack up their things, Harry stared at Caro and Draco, nodded slightly and formed the word later with his lips. Soon afterwards Sirius led them along a broad corridor. He halted in front of a door, opened it and let them enter. It was a big, bright room and Harry's eyes fell on the young woman who had rose out of a chair by their entrance and who came towards them now. She had deep blue eyes which looked at him full of warmth, as she gave him her hand.

"Hallo, Harry. I'm Charlotte Black."

She studied him and as she added,

"So we see each other again," a memory rose in him.

He had once again underestimated Harry, the Dark Lord thought, while pacing restlessly back and forth in his study. As he had discovered that it wasn't possible anymore to call Harry's beloved house-elf to him, he had been speechless for a moment. Still it was an unexplainable mystery how Harry had managed this. After all he had seen to it himself that Harry and his friends didn't get hold of

books in which curses were written which belonged to the darkest magic.

The charm Harry must have used to free his house-elf from his power and those curses he had used on Harry's chambers didn't belong to those but they hadn't been in one of the books which Harry and his friends had got. So how had Harry managed to break the curses on his windows and to free his house-elf? His gaze slid down to his foot. That this rat had bitten him hadn't been an accident and actually there was only one plausible explanation for it.

He hadn't attached much importance to Peter's disappearance then. Now he would regret his negligence. But never the thought would have occurred to him to suspect Peter with Harry. Which other secrets the boy had hidden from him? What was bothering however above all things was the question where Harry and his friends had gone to? To Godric's Hollow the children definitely hadn't returned, neither had they sought refuge in the estates of the Malfoys and Lestranges. That they had the intention to live in the street seemed unlikely to him.

There still was Pettigrew's estate left, but he doubted that the children had gone there of all places. As he had gone to Godric's Hollow, it certainly hadn't escaped his notice that someone had recently broken through the wards Harry and his friends had set up around the house then. Could it be that Harry had got in touch with the friends of his parents? That would at least explain how Harry had heard of the curses. Was it possible that he had sought refuge in Hogwarts? As he took this possibility into consideration, he felt how white-hot fury shot through him. Strangely enough he felt a burning pain as well.

Hermione watched how Harry and Carolina were studying the library speculatively. In the meantime Draco gave the impression of being bored. As Hermione had heard yesterday that Sirius' niece and nephew would stay with them in the future she had been speechless in the true sense of the word. She hadn't known that Sirius had still family. But it was rather strange that Sirius had never mentioned it before that he had a brother. Hermione shrugged her shoulders.

Perhaps Sirius had had a row with his family and never spoken of them because of it. Although she burned with curiosity, she resisted to ask her questions. First Sirius and Charlotte had requested it from her as they had asked her if she couldn't show the three newcomers the castle with her friends and second she suspected that the reason for the sudden appearance of Harry, Carolina and Draco could be a Death Eater attack. All three of them had been rather taciturn so far but it was understandable should her presumption be correct. She remembered exactly after all how it had been as her whole world had collapsed over night.

For a short moment she was again the little girl who crouched behind a big wall-clock while being nearly beside herself out of fear. The pain as her fingernails dug into her palms brought her back to her senses. She lifted her head and her gaze met with light grey eyes which were staring at her strangely intense. Hermione turned curtly around.

„Do we want to go on now?“ she asked. Her voice sounded shrill. Promptly Ginny cast a quick glance at her.

Hermione had the feeling to suffocate. She needed air so that she decided there and then to show Carolina, Harry and Draco the Quidditch field. For the remaining parts of the castle there was left enough time tomorrow.

Alison stared at the book in her hand and swallowed. She had certainly read the pages already about a dozen of times without remembering even one single word. Her heart constricted with fear. Still Severus hadn't returned. If it would get late, he had sent her a notice per owl each time. It was of course only a slight comfort but nevertheless it was better than nothing. But today no owl had tapped against the window and had brought her a letter. Alison put the book aside, stood up and went quietly over to the room of her daughter. She breathed Lizzie a kiss on her forehead and tucked her daughter in. What should become of them if Severus wouldn't return?

Going back into her bedroom she began to wander across the carpet. As she looked down, she laughed out loud. In the light of the magical candles she could see the tracks her wanderings had left. Each time

the Dark Lord had called Severus to him, she had paced back and forth anxiously. What was taking him so long? It was already past midnight. Alison stared over to the window and focussed on it. Sudden anger at Dumbledore rose in her. He had wanted to know nothing of all the fears. Severus himself had doubted if he would be able to lie convincingly should he be asked after the children.

Since their disappearance must be the reason for Severus not returning home yet and him not sending her a message above all. 'Please, let him come back!' she prayed urgently. The endless waiting was nerve-racking but she knew that it was useless to wanting to try something else. She wouldn't be able to sleep anyway. Finally she squatted down in one of the armchairs. Put her arms around her knees and riveted her eyes on the window.

As Harry opened his eyes the next day, he needed a moment to realize what had woken him. It had been the sound of scratching claws. He turned around and blinked in the direction of the wooden box which was standing on one of the shelves. His thoughts began to concentrate again on the problem what on earth they should do with Peter; in the hands of Sirius and the Order of Phoenix he definitely shouldn't fall. He needed a place where he could hide not only Peter but his books, which contained Dark Magic, as well; a place where he could train curses with his friends undisturbed and where no one could find them. All of a sudden he set upright. Of course that was the perfect solution. He only had to remember...

In that moment however the door opened and he was jolted out of his pondering. Nell padded into the room and stared at him with frightened eyes which swam in tears. Harry's eyes fell on the pink pullover and he understood.

"You're free, Nell. Why are you crying then?"

"Young master isn't angry?" she whispered.

Harry threw his blanket aside, kneeled down on the floor and hugged the little house-elf close to himself.

“Oh, Nell. Why should I be angry? It’s great that you are free. If I would have been able to, I would have given you your freedom long ago. Nell, stop crying.”

Hearing soft steps, he lifted his head and gazed into the dark eyes of Caro. He knew that Caro had done this for him.

Cautiously he let go of Nell, stood up and went towards her.

“Thank you, Caro. That I’ll never forget.”

Caro smiled and wanted to say something but a briskly loud voice prevented her from doing so.

“Is this a real snake, Hermione?”

Immediately afterwards a startled cry rang out and Harry who abruptly realized that Diamond wasn’t curled around his arm as usual, ran out of the room. Hermione was staring with a pale face at the floor. One arm she had laid around Jamie who was regarding Diamond with much curiosity. In her hand Hermione held her wand which she pointed at the little snake.

“No! Hermione, take your wand away. Diamond isn’t dangerous.”

Though his snake was deadly poisonous, Harry knew that Diamond would never bite someone, unless he would order her to do so.

“Hermione, what...”

Sirius and Charlotte had appeared at the door. Harry didn’t pay any attention to it as he held his arm towards Diamond.

“Come. You won’t roam around in the castle anymore from now on. It’s too dangerous. Do you hear me?” he hissed while Diamond disappeared under his sleeve and curled herself around his arm.

“Of course I hear you. I’m not deaf after all,” the soft answer came.

Looking up he saw how Sirius, Charlotte and Hermione stared at him aghast and horrified. Only Jamie still looked at him with a curious expression, mixed with admiration, in his eyes.

“That was so wicked! Will you teach me to speak like that?” the little boy shouted.

During breakfast Harry found himself compelled to explain to a disappointed four year old why it was impossible for him to learn Parseltongue. So far Sirius had been silent and Harry wondered what on earth his godfather was thinking at this moment. That he had spoken Parsel he had regretted already as he had seen the faces of Sirius, Charlotte and Hermione. But never before had Harry have to hide this gift and the conversations with Diamond were so perfectly natural for a long time that he even didn't notice anymore if he spoke Parsel-tongue. Here, in Hogwarts however he had better to keep his gift a secret.

“Jamie, it's enough. Eat your breakfast. Harry, a snake as a pet isn't allowed in Hogwarts, so...”

“I won't give her away, Sirius,” Harry, who suspected at what Sirius was getting, interrupted his godfather coolly.

“Uncle Sirius, Harry.”

Interesting, Harry thought, as he saw how Sirius' gaze nervously flickered over to Hermione. So Hermione didn't know the truth.

“It absolutely doesn't matter to me if it's allowed or not. I won't give Diamond away, Uncle Sirius,” Harry repeated steadily.

“Is your snake poisonous?” Charlotte interfered unexpectedly.

“No,” Harry lied and looked straight into Charlotte's face.

“Can you promise me that you won't let you snake wander freely around?” she continued to ask.

“Yes,” Harry answered.

“Then you can keep it. But please be careful, Harry. If it’s discovered that you are a Parseltongue, there could arise difficulties. Many would fear you.”

Sirius wanted to say something but Charlotte’s gaze made him stop and Harry asked himself why Charlotte had helped him while taking thoughtfully a sip from his, still, hot tea.

Charlotte reached as well for her cup and suddenly dropped it again with a loud rattling sound.

“Alison!” she shouted and Harry turned around. The Potions teacher stood in the door. She must have come in so silently that no one of them had heard her. Her face was white and she had dark shadows under her eyes.

“What happened?” Charlotte asked who had stood up.

“He didn’t come back,” Alison whispered and the next moment she cried in Charlotte’s arms.

A dark expression had entered Sirius’ face while Hermione looked just totally stunned as Harry noticed. Jamie however looked startled.

“Does Albus know already?”

Alison straightened and shook her head. For one moment Harry had the impression to see hate in her eyes.

„Then we should tell him. Hermione, will you watch after Jamie? Come, Alison, perhaps he was only held up.”

“Held up? It has never taken so long and if, then he would send me a notice. Something has happen, I know it,” Alison sobbed, but let herself be led out by Sirius.

Charlotte calmed down Jamie, kisses the little one on the forehead and after giving Hermione some instructions, she also left the room.

A little while later Harry and Caro, in the company of Hermione, set off to go to Draco. Jamie, who had promised his mother solemnly not

to say anything of the snake or Harry's talent to speak in a strange hissing language to anyone, jumped merrily behind them. Harry was rather sceptical if you could rely on Jamie, but somehow it didn't matter to him momentarily. He was still angry that Sirius had considered taking Diamond away from him. The memory of his shocked face as he had spoken Parsel infuriated him no less.

„We have to fetch Meggie and Ian. It's only a small detour,” Hermione said and led them along a broad corridor.

Harry sifted through his memory. The names seemed vaguely familiar to him.

“Remus' children?” he asked.

Hermione cast a surprised look at him.

“Yes. Have you forgotten that we shall bring the children to Ginny's mother?”

„Don't you know Remus and Emily?”

Harry tried to find quickly a plausible answer, but Caro beat him to it.

„We never meet them. Our family was unfortunately forced to remain in hiding.”

Caro's voice had sounded so off-putting and cold that it was not very likely that Hermione would continue to ask, Harry thought and he was right. For the remaining way Hermione was silent. In the meantime Harry was busy with remembering the route they went along.

Remus greeted them warmly and gave Harry a bright smile. Involuntarily Harry asked himself if Remus also was filled with feelings of revenge towards Peter and had as well the intention to kill him as soon as he would meet him. After fetching Meggie and Ian they set off to the dungeons which were impressive but didn't compare with those in the castle of the Dark Lord. In Alison's chambers they found Draco who was reading a story to a little black-curved thing with a rather grumpy expression on his face. Relieved he looked up at them while Lizzie looked a bit disappointed.

The little children were delivered to Molly Weasley, a slightly plump woman, and Ginny, her brother and Neville who Harry had met already yesterday joined them promptly. Really great, Harry thought, until an opportunity would arise to be alone with his friends it would certainly still take a while.

Ron suggested to play Quidditch. Since they were already seven of them and it wouldn't be any problem in his opinion to organize another team, it would be the obvious thing to do. Ron's two brothers, who introduced themselves as Fred and George and were as like two peas, got indeed hold of five other players. Harry who for the first time played really Quidditch realized what a gigantic difference that was. He would have never expected that it could be so much fun. The positions were exchanged and Harry found out that he hadn't the slightest talent as a keeper.

While Sirius was gazing after his wife and Alison he tried to push aside the memory which suggested itself to him for quite a long time. He didn't succeed however. The Order meeting, as expected, hadn't been able to reach a decision what to do in view of Severus' not returning to the castle. Albus had been deeply worried but had said that there was not the slightest possibility for the Order to help Severus. Though he had given the other spies of the Order the instruction to try to find out what had happen to Severus but since only Severus had belonged to the Inner Circle of the Dark Lord, the chance was rather slim that they would find out anything. Severus' fate didn't really bother him but he worried about Alison and Lizzie who Sirius had grew very fond of long ago. After some searching Sirius found Harry, his friends, Hermione and the Weasley children on the Quidditch field.

Sirius watched them and riveted his eyes finally on Harry who was obviously looking out for the Snitch high up in the air. As he had heard this morning how Harry had spoken with his snake he hadn't wanted to believe it and still he wasn't convinced that it had been right to allow Harry to keep the snake. There was so much he didn't know from Harry and Sirius didn't want to acknowledge it but Harry was like a stranger for him and suddenly he wondered if Harry would

ever trust him and he would ever find out what had happened in the Dark Lord's castle.

In the moment he had seen Harry's house-elf which he hadn't noticed yesterday for whatever reasons – probably it had charmed itself invisible, after all good house-elves ought not to be seen – he had wondered if it hadn't been this house-elf for which Harry had needed the curse. It was very likely and Sirius smiled involuntarily.

Just this showed that Harry wasn't a dark wizard and obviously Voldemort hadn't had much influence on Harry, Sirius thought with grim satisfaction. Sirius watched them still for a while and winked Harry after some effortless attempts finally down. In brief words Sirius told Harry about Severus Snape and taking a deep breath he shortly afterwards asked the question which had caused him to look for Harry.

Harry who had listened to Sirius with rigid face the previous minutes stared at Sirius. *That he had never written.* But in the same moment he realized that he had done it. Torn between suppressed rage and the thought of Snape, he knew that he wouldn't tell Sirius where the secret passage way was.

He would not betray his adoptive father. Furthermore, to escape was one thing but to tell Sirius where the passage way was, a entirely different. His friends would never forgive him if he would hand over their parents to the Order of the Phoenix. Then it sent a shiver down his spine as he suddenly realized that Snape had very probably told his adoptive father where they were. Blankly he looked at his godfather,

"Why did Snape go back?"

Sirius sighed heavily.

"Albus has hoped that Severus would manage to manoeuvre himself out of difficulties which would eventually crop up. In the past he managed it so often already. Furthermore he is our only spy who is a member belonging to Voldemort's closest circle. You don't know how difficult it is actually to smuggle spies among the Death Eaters so that..."

“...so that Dumbledore thought that Snape would manage it this time as well,” Harry finished Sirius’ explanation while he could only shake his head over such a stupidity. Be that as it may, it was very likely that Snape was already dead. Harry didn’t doubt that his adoptive father had brought Severus to reveal him all information. Harry suspected that his adoptive father was currently busy to develop a plan how he would get him back to Arreton Castle. It was strange however; it occurred to Harry, that not even a single letter had reached him or his friends so far. Draco’s parents and Bella had surely found out the whereabouts of their children. Before he could think further about this, Sirius said.

„Please, Harry, tell me how you managed to go Diagon Alley without being seen by anyone.”

Harry looked unmoved at his godfather.

“There is no secret passage way. You have misunderstood my letter. And I was seen. You’ve forgotten who I am. Or do you think that a Death Eater would have ever got in my way?

Harry saw how Sirius flinched.

“Can I go back now?” he asked shortly afterwards and without waiting for a reply turned around.

While Harry was hurrying back to the Quidditch field, he said to himself that it had been the right thing to do. Snape was dead and no one would be able to help him anymore. But if it was so why was he then so angry? Harry had hardly joined his friends and the other Quidditch players, as he forgot Snape and Sirius and only thought of the game. As they exhausted set off to the castle towards evening, they discussed eagerly the different strategies. The cleft between the newcomers and the Hogwarts children seemed to have vanished for the time being.

A few hours later Harry, Caro and Draco who had charmed themselves invisible sneaked out to the lake which was shimmering like a mirror in the moonlight and here they were finally undisturbed.

“What did your godfather actually want from you?” Draco wanted to know while he sat down on the shore. Harry told them and as he had expected it they were furious. Caro shook her head so fiercely that her black curls were flying.

“I absolutely don’t like it here. On top of that I’ve to say that my name is Carolina Black! Why did you want us to be silent yesterday, Harry? I would have loved to give Black a piece of my mind.”

“If everyone knew who we were, we wouldn’t be welcomed here, Caro.” Harry replied.

“Furthermore I thought that it would take then a bit longer until my adoptive father would find out where we are.

But that was been taken care of now.”

“It’s strange, isn’t it? We haven’t got a single letter so far,” Draco said and looked at Harry and Caro.

Harry nodded thoughtfully. Finally Caro said what they all were thinking.

“They’re intercepted.”

„What will we do against it?” Draco asked who had knitted his brow.

After a while of silence, Harry said,

“The only thing what would be possible would be to intercept the owls.”

Draco snorted.

“Just great.”

As they went back to the castle they hadn’t found a solution how they could enable that they got their letters but they had agreed that they would leave Hogwarts again, as soon as someone of them would have an idea where else they could stay.

The next days passed quickly and Harry, Caro and Draco spent them solely with playing Quidditch. They let themselves shown the castle by Hermione and her friends and Harry did not only get to know his godfather and Charlotte better but also Remus and Emily, as well his godmother Minerva McGonagall.

With Albus Dumbledore he had had a meeting, too. But Harry had instantly felt solid dislike towards the friendly acting old wizard. Not only was he intercepting their letters but he had also sent Snape back and this was something Harry couldn't forgive. The main reason for this was that the Potions teacher Alison Lennox had come to him and had thanked him for not handing Snape over to Voldemort then. He had felt that the young woman loved Snape and suspected that Snape was also the father of little Lizzie. With tears in her ocean-blue eyes she had asked whether he believed if Severus was still alive.

As he had silently shaken his head, she had nodded bravely. But what had touched Harry was that Alison didn't blame him. It was after all their escape which was indirectly to blame that Severus hadn't returned. While he could have kept the passage way a secret from his godfather it had been much more difficult in the presence of Alison. Over and over again he said to himself that Severus was not alive anymore.

Furthermore he had saved Snape's life already one time and if Snape was so stupid to go back – he could have refused after all – then it wasn't his problem, was it? A little persistent voice he couldn't however silence. What if Snape was still alive and was waiting for help in some cell? But that was rather unlikely, Harry said to himself. He had also realized how utterly important it was that no one discovered the secret passage way. Should the Order find it out they would be able to sneak unhindered into the castle. So Harry kept silent but he couldn't forget this matter.

Apart from this Dumbledore tried indeed to question him how Voldemort had treated him and why he had suddenly appeared in Hogwarts. While Sirius seemed to have accepted his wish not to tell anything about his past, Dumbledore was not so impressed of this and had told him all sorts of things about a duty he had towards his

parents who had fought against Voldemort. His parents were as well a point he couldn't forgive Dumbledore.

Sirius had told him that it had been well-known that a spy had been up to no good in the ranks of the Order and so Harry asked himself why Dumbledore hadn't question all members with Veritaserum. Would he have been the leader and such rumours had been passed to him, he would have acted in such a way. His adoptive father would have done the same as well, Harry was sure of it. That Snape had managed to deceive the Dark Lord was thoroughly remarkable. But who knows, perhaps his adoptive father knew of his loyalty to Dumbledore. Absent-minded Harry stroked his phoenix. Why his life couldn't be easy for once? Why everything had to be always so complicated?

On the day of the Sorting feast Harry wondered in which house he would come. As it was finally time to sort the new students in their houses, Harry looked expectantly over to the Speaking Hat. Although, if you thought about it he asked himself for what the different houses were actually good for. Soon his name would be called out. Caro had been sorted already into Slytherin but since she was one year older than him the headmaster had decided that Caro would go into the third class. Over that Harry, Caro and Draco had been angry, too but Dumbledore had got his way however. Then his godmother finally called his name. It was still unused for him to run around the place as Harry Black. Harry stood up and a little later he put the hat on his head and a squeaky voice rang out,

"So, Harry Potter, finally you have found the way to Hogwarts. But as I see it you have still not decide. You should however decide soon on which side you are. Fate has often the ability to strike before you're ready. The day will come, young Potter, where you have to decide. Well, in which house should I put you?"

„Slytherin' Harry thought.

„Hmm, you're brave and loyal to those you love....interesting, I don't see any hate. You don't want revenge but nevertheless....Yes, I think, I know in which house you belong." The hat continued to whisper.

„Slytherin!“ he screamed loudly and while Harry went slowly to Caro, he wished that the prophecy of the hat hadn't sounded so convincingly promising disaster.

Chapter 25

September 1992

Ginny Weasley frowned thoughtfully and while casting a quick glance at Hermione who was going alongside her, she said,

“But Hermione. Why should they lie to us?”

“I don’t know, Ginny. It’s only everything so strange. Sirius has never mentioned a brother before and I’ve seen pictures of his family. A brother I have never seen on them. And then Caro’s remark that they were forced to hide. How then Draco fits in the picture? They know each other; that is obvious. Did they have to hide together? Why didn’t they come to Hogwarts one year ago? And Caro is already thirteen. No, something is wrong there.”

Hermione opened the door to her room and stepped to the big bulky cupboard which was standing in one of the corners.

Ginny set down on Hermione’s bed.

“Couldn’t you have packed yesterday already?”

“No, I couldn’t. I had to look after Jamie, Lizzie and Emily’s children. Later was then the Sorting feast and today we had already lessons. So I hadn’t any time so far,” Hermione replied, slightly irritated.

“It looks like that Caro also hadn’t time to bring her things to Slytherin so far,” Ginny remarked and pointed with her head to the second bed on which a book was lying.

Hermione shrugged with her shoulders.

„ Sirius wasn’t happy at all that Caro, Harry and Draco were all put into Slytherin. As I wanted to say Jamie goodnight yesterday I’ve heard him talking to Charlotte.”

“Well, he won’t be able to change it,” Ginny said, stood up and looked down at Caro’s book.

“The Standard Book of Spells, grade 3,” she mumbled.

“Shall we bring it her?”

Without waiting for an answer, she picked it up and just wanted to turn as she halted. Something was lying under the pillow. Curiously she pushed it aside. It was a photograph. A black-haired man with laughing dark eyes was facing her. If it wouldn't have been for the terrible scar on his left cheek, he would have been rather handsome.

“That must be Caro's and Harry's father,” Ginny said and held the picture towards Hermione who had stepped closer.

Hermione took it. Nearly immediately her eyes widened. Her face lost all colour and while her hands clung to the photo, she sank on the bed.

“Hermione! What's wrong?” Ginny exclaimed.

Hermione slowly turned her head around and stared at her with strange lifeless eyes. Ginny sat next to Hermione, laid an arm around her shoulders and asked gently,

“Hermione, what's wrong? Do you know this man?”

“He has murdered my father.” In the first moment Ginny was only relieved that Hermione had spoken but as she understood the sense of what had been said she froze.

“What?” she asked confused.

Her friend looked at her. Tears were shimmering in her brown eyes.

“I've seen it, Ginny and I've never forgotten it. I'm sure. He has murdered my Dad. He is a Death Eater,” she said in a cracking voice and dropped the picture. She trembled. As a week ago in the library Hermione was caught up by her past. She saw the blinding green light, saw first her father, then her mother falling to the ground, saw....

“Hermione! Hermione!”

Ginny shook her.

„Shall I fetch Charlotte?” she asked.

Charlotte, Hermione thought, had she known? Had she known that Sirius' brother had murdered her father? Was it that why that he had never been mentioned before? Because Sirius' brother was a Death Eater?

“No,” she said slowly.

“Ginny, please let me alone for one moment. I...have to think.”

But Ginny didn't move.

“Charlotte surely did not know it, Hermione.”

Hermione shook her head.

“But they have withheld the truth from us. And perhaps Sirius' brother doesn't exist as well and Harry, Draco and Caro were captured. I don't know it!”

Casting an imploring glance at Ginny, she said,

“Please! Let me alone for a while.”

Ginny hesitated but to Hermione's relief she finally went out of the room. The door had hardly closed after Ginny, as Hermione curled herself up and began to sob.

Harry cursed as he found himself in an empty classroom. In this room the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets was definitely not located. Disappointed he turned around. Not for the first time he cursed the fact that though his adoptive father had told him that such a chamber existed which only those could open who spoke Parsel, he had never described the exact way. Slytherin's chamber would have been ideal of course.

There they would be undisturbed and no one would be able to find them. Somewhere the entrance had to be. After all they hadn't had much time to search so far. Perhaps Caro and Draco would be successful. They had immediately agreed to split up. The greatest difficulty was however that they didn't know exactly after what they were searching. He turned around a corner and headed towards the staircase which, he knew, led to the Great Hall. Great, he thought, now I've run in circles. He had put his foot already on the uppermost step, as his eyes fell on a large picture which hung on the wall next to the stairs.

The picture was rather in the shade but he was sure that he had seen a snake. Had that been pure chance or did it have a meaning? He stepped closer and saw that it was not only one snake but very many. They all curled around a tremendous tree. Even between the green leaves snakes peeped out. It was a strange picture and while he was staring at it, some snake seemed to raise their heads.

"I don't reckon that you could tell me where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is?"

"You have to go through."

Harry blinked.

"To go through?" he hissed and regarded the picture attentively.

Before he could decide however if he should follow the snake's instruction or not, a faint noise caused him to whirl around. Ginny Weasley was staring at him with a shocked expression in her dark-brown eyes. She had of course listened to his rather unusual conversation. She swallowed and met his eyes. One moment she seemed to hesitate but then she asked,

"Can I talk to you for a minute?"

Though Harry was surprised, he didn't show it while pondering what reason Ginny could have for wanting to talk with him. They hardly knew each other after all.

"Sure," he replied.

Turning around, she said,

„But not here. Can we go to the lake?“

While walking next to each other, Ginny was silent and looked straight ahead. Harry's thoughts were occupied with the picture in the meantime. Was it really the entrance to the chamber? Hopefully the conversation with Ginny wouldn't take so long, he thought annoyed. What did she want from him anyway? As they reached the Hogwarts Lake a little while later, he asked impatiently,

“So what is it?“

Ginny didn't answer him. Instead she held him a picture under his nose.

“Where do you have it from?“

“We've found it in Hermione's room – on Caro's bed. Hermione recognized him. He is the murderer of her father. Your parents were Death Eaters and all the lies that Sirius is your uncle are because of it, aren't they?“

Her eyes glowed angrily at him.

Harry looked down at Ginny and took the photo out of her hand. Dumbledore's and Sirius' plan to keep their identity secret would certainly turn out to be much more difficult than they had imagined.

“Did the Order take you prisoner?“

Harry raised one eyebrow and laughed softly.

“No. We grew up in Voldemort's headquarter. But since we didn't feel particularly inclined to learn how to torture and kill most effectively, we've fled to Hogwarts. The Order of the Phoenix is only afraid that Voldemort could attack Hogwarts if he should discover that we are here so that Dumbledore thought it better to keep our real names secret.“

„Why should he attack Hogwarts for three children and put so much at risk?” Ginny asked sceptically.

“Do you know who the Malfoys and Lestranges are?”

“Yes, it’s said that they are his closest confidants. But what this have...”

Ginny broke up.

„Are they your parents?”

„ Draco’s parents are the Malfoys and Caro is a Lestrangle. And I am Voldemort’s adoptive son. Do you know understand why the thought isn’t so far stretched that my adoptive father could attack Hogwarts, should he find out that we are here?”

Ginny stared at him unbelievably and stepped a step back.

“His adoptive son?”

Caro hurried in a bad mood back to the common room of the Slytherins. For the time being she had enough to search after something of which she hadn’t the slightest clue how it looked like.

Perhaps only those were able to find the chamber who had the gift of speaking the language of the snakes. In this case it was a completely waste of time anyway if she searched after the chamber. Running upstairs, she turned around a corner and found herself unexpectedly face to face with a red-haired young wizard.

Since she wanted to avoid him, she stepped aside. But as he did the same, she stepped in the other direction and stormed forwards. Immediately she ran into his arms as he did once again the same as she.

“Sorry,” he said and Caro looked up. In the moment she saw in his laughing dark eyes, she forgot everything around her.

“What?” she stammered, realizing that he had spoken something of which she hadn’t understood anything.

He gave her his hand.

“I’m Charlie Weasley. And you?”

„Carolina Les...Black, but my friends call me Caro,“ she said as soon as she had herself under control again.

“Yes, right. Sirius Blacks niece, isn’t it? Ginny has told me about you and the others. Can it be that you have got lost? You’re rather far away from the Slytherins common room. Or did you wanted to go somewhere else?”

“I’ve got lost,”she said and it was true. She had indeed only a vague imagination where she currently was.

“Then come, I’ll bring you.”

While following Charlie, she curiously asked if he was still going to school. Charlie shook his head.

“I’ve finished this summer. Now I want to become an Auror. I must help to eliminate the Dark Side.”

In the meantime they had reached the Great Hall and Caro said coldly,

“Thanks. But from here I find the way alone,” and left Charlie behind with a perplex expression on his face.

Hurrying the corridor along, she quickened her pace while asking herself why it was bothering her that Charlie Weasley wanted to become an Auror. On her account he could become whatever he wanted. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she also had to get lost on her remaining way to the common room on.

Cursing she choose the left branch after short thinking. Her eyes swept over a silver suit of armour, which was standing in one corner and abruptly she stopped in her tracks. She stared at the old sword

which was stuck in the metallic hand of the knight. She reached out with her hand and touched the razor-sharp blade. Blood gushed out from her fingertip. Blind with tears she ran her finger across the engraved letters and the coat of arms. She didn't need to see it to know that it was her father's sword.

As she imagined how the murderers of her father also stole his sword – as if murdering him wasn't already enough – Caro's tears dried quickly. An icy coldness was left in her grey ease. She took her wand and shortly afterwards she found the right way back. In her hand she held tightly the now tiny sword. Stepping in her dormitory, she was relieved to see that it was deserted. She sat down on her bed and sighed. Since she had come to Hogwarts she couldn't stop thinking about her father. It was time to take action. Regarding the little sword she began to ponder how she could find out who had murdered her Dad.

It would be difficult, that she knew but she wouldn't give up. There had to be documents somewhere about the single attacks and raids. The followers of the Dark Lord kept also an exact record of the fights and Caro knew as well whom she would ask for help. She hadn't given Nell her freedom without any ulterior motive. That she had found the sword seemed to her like a sigh of destiny, too. But still she hesitated.

Why, she thought angrily, did Harry have to mean so much to her? Her feelings towards him would not bring her to break her oath however which she had taken shortly after the death of her father. She would find out who the murderer had been and then she would take revenge. Caro looked to the bedside locker and wanted to reach for the photo of her father. At the same moment she saw that the picture wasn't on her little table, she remembered that she had to have forgotten it in Hermione's room. Jumping up, she ran out of the dormitory.

As she reached the chambers of the Blacks without breath, she found the doors locked. But Caro hadn't listened to her mother or Draco's parents for nothing and those charms were not a big problem for her. To her surprise she saw Hermione lying on her bed. Thinking that she was sleeping, Caro began to search for her photo.

“Your photo isn’t here.”

Caro spun around. The brown eyes of Hermione started at her hostilely.

“Where is it?”

Hermione didn’t answer so that Caro made a step towards Hermione and repeated her question. There was now a threatening undertone in her voice.

“Your father murdered mine,” Hermione said full of hatred.

“What did you do with my picture?” Caro hissed and pointed her wand at Hermione.

“Harry has your photo,” a voice rang out from the door and Ginny entered the room.

“I wanted to bring it to you.”

Caro lowered her wand, turned around wordlessly and went out with long strides. At Hermione and Ginny she didn’t deign to look.

In contrast to Sirius who had set off to go for a walk with Remus after supper, Charlotte hadn’t missed Hermione’s low spirits so that she, after bringing Jamie to bed and asking the first best who went past her door to look shortly after Jamie, she set off to the dormitory of the Gryffindors where Hermione would mainly spend her time in the future, at least as long as school was. Soon afterwards Charlotte crawled into Hermione’s comfortable four-poster bed, hugged the surprised girl and whispered,

“Hermione, dear, what is wrong?”

Hermione shook her head.

„Nothing, it’s nothing,” she said flatly and avoided it to look Charlotte in the eyes.

“No one will hear us. I’ve charmed the curtains. Hermione, I’m seeing after all that something is wrong. Perhaps I can help you,” Charlotte tried to bring Hermione once more to talk to her.

As Hermione lifted her head, Charlotte flinched back from the pain in her brown eyes. They seemed to reproach Charlotte silently.

“Why did you lie to us all? Why didn’t you say us that Harry’s, Caro’s and Draco’s parents are Death Eaters?”

Hermione stared at her and her voice broke, as she continued to speak,

“Caro’s father murdered mine. I’ve recognized him today on one of her pictures.”

As Charlotte realized what Hermione had just said, she closed her eyes for a moment. Then she embraced the girl tightly and ran a hand over Hermione’s brown curls.

“I’m so sorry, Hermione. The Order thought it for the better to keep their true identities secret because...”

“...the Dark Lord could attack the castle otherwise. I know, Ginny told me that Harry is his adoptive son. What I don’t understand is why Sirius is so happy since Harry and the others have come to Hogwarts.”

Charlotte sighed and pushing aside the question wherefrom Ginny had such knowledge she said,

“You do know who James and Lily Potter were, don’t you? And what happened to them? Everyone thought that their son was killed as well then. But a short time ago it turned out that he has survived. That’s why Sirius is so happy because he has found his godson again.”

Hermione’s eyes widened and realization was mirrored on her face.

Albus' eyebrows smoothed out as he heard the familiar singing of Fawkes. The long absence of his phoenix had already worried him. Looking over to the open window he awaited every moment that Fawkes would come flying in. And indeed he didn't need to be patient for long. The unique fact that Fawkes wasn't flying alone into his office, surprised him however. A deep black, in the light of the magic candles, slightly golden- green shimmering phoenix was hovering next to Fawkes whose lovely singing now mixes with Fawkes.

Albus, who was absorbed in regarding the magical birds, remembered that Harry Potter had got such a phoenix.

His thoughts wandered to Harry and he sighed. To convince some of the Order members that Harry and his friends didn't present any danger for the Order had been hard work. But it wasn't this that gave the old wizard quite a headache. It was Harry. He had tried to talk with the boy who had Lily's emerald eyes and looked so similar to James, had wanted to hear if he was following the Dark Side. He had to admit however that he had failed miserably.

Though Harry had listened to him with rigid face, Albus was sure that he could have talked to a wall just as well and of his own accord the boy actually had said nothing so that Albus hadn't discovered anything worth mentioning. It was worrying him also that Harry and his friends had all got into Slytherin. Had Tom's influence been stronger than Albus wanted to believe? But if it was so then why had they escaped?

Why Harry had been so magically overexerted as they had arrived here about nearly two weeks ago? Albus supported his chin with his hands, riveted his eyes absentmindedly on the phoenixes which had cuddled up to each other and he scolded himself. Harry was in Hogwarts and thus he was out of reach for Tom Riddle's influence and wouldn't fight against them in the future. He should be optimistic and happy. Perhaps Harry only needed time to settle in, Albus thought. Confidently Albus said to himself that some day he would win Harry's trust. Leaning back, he closed his eyes and listened to the singing of the phoenixes.

It was late in the evening as Harry, together with Caro and Draco, sneaked to the picture which hid the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets as Harry suspected. He stared at the many snakes and hissed,

“So we only have to go through?”

As one of the reptiles nodded, Harry shrugged his shoulders, took a deep breath, reached with one hand for Caro's and with the other for Draco's hand and stepped forwards. One moment later they found themselves in complete darkness. Harry's magic let the darkness retreat and a staircase which wound itself to dizzying depths became visible. Caro looked down and swallowed nervously.

“Well, let's go,” Harry finally said and put his foot on the first step. The single steps were so narrow that they had to hold onto the banisters and all of them avoided looking down. It took them long until they finally reached the bottom of the stairs. After they had caught their breath again they saw that they were standing in a tremendous stony chamber. Harry's light fell onto high columns which soared upwards to the ceiling.

“Slytherin's chamber,” Draco whispered awed. Going to the opposite wall their steps echoed through the long hall.

“Here we will be undisturbed at least.” Harry remarked satisfied. Reaching the other end, they saw two branching corridors. Curiously where they would lead to Harry and Caro took the right one and Draco the left branch. While Caro and Harry walked along the narrow passage way, Caro suddenly stopped, turned to Harry and looked at him.

“Harry, I want you to help me finding the murderer of my father,” she said.

Chapter 26

Two hours later Harry lay in bed with wide eyes and tried to calm down his troubled thoughts but failed miserably. Sighing he turned around and remembered the events of the day and wondered why he had told Ginny their real names so willingly. He didn't even know if he could trust her. Had it been because he secretly wished that his real identity came to light? Did he want that everyone knew that he was Harry Potter? Quietly he whispered his name. It sounded so strange and somehow not right as well. Harry Potter, Harry Riddle, Harry Black. Who of this three was he? Pushing aside the blanket, he tugged at the curtains of the four-poster bed, climbed out and went to the window where he sat down on the window seat.

Ginny had surely related Hermione everything what he had told her by the lake and Hermione? Would everyone in the castle know their names soon? Why it had had to be Caro's father of all people who had murdered Hermione's father? Hardly had he asked himself this question, his thoughts wandered back to Caro. Though it wasn't any question for him whether he would help her or not, for him it was self-explaining, he nevertheless felt uneasy if he thought of the possible consequences. What would Caro do should she really find out who it had been and what he would do then?

He didn't even know how Caro wanted to discover the truth. Their branch had led them to a dead end but Draco's way led him to a small library and excitedly he had immediately called for them. One part of the books they found there, were even written in Parsel as Harry had awestruck realized. Fascinated he had looked around. Though his adoptive father also possessed books in Parsel, he hadn't nearly as many as in this little library in the Chamber of Secrets stood. Harry decided to return to the books as soon as possible.

They were now two weeks in Hogwarts and Harry knew that this place as well wasn't a right home for them. He hadn't missed the glances at all which some of the teachers and above all members of the Order of the Phoenix had given him if they had met him in the hallways, in the Great Hall or on the rambling grounds. Not all had

been happy over their arrival and Harry didn't doubt that the Order was in the picture about their real identities.

Yawning he slid off the window seat. He was feeling cold. Trembling he tiptoed to his bed, stumbled over a obstacle lying on the ground and bumped painfully against a hard object while something was loudly broken. Cursing he whispered a word and his magic flared up and he saw that he had fallen against the table and the water bottle had fallen down.

"It's all right. Sorry, for waking you up," he said while looking at Nell who stared sleepily at him with wide eyes.

Harry repaired the broken bottle and saw over to Draco, wondering why he hadn't also woken up by such a noise. The curtains were open and approaching, he realized that Draco wasn't in his bed at all. Blinking he stood there clueless for a moment. Had he been so absorbed in his thoughts that he hadn't even noticed how Draco had left the room? Then he slipped into his shoes, put on his cloak and set off to search for Draco. Without exactly knowing where he should look for, he roamed through the deserted castle. In the great Hall Draco came towards him finally, surrounded by the gentle shining of his magical light.

"Where on earth were you?" Harry wanted to know.

"You said that the only thing we could do were to intercept the letters, didn't you?" Draco answered and waved a letter in front of his face.

As they were walking back, Harry asked,

"How did you do it?"

In the glow of their lights Draco gave him an impish smile.

"Well, in the rare moments where it was possible I continued to try becoming an Animagus. And yesterday I finally did it."

"That's so great! Why haven't you told us? Into which animal do you change?" Harry asked excited.

"I turn....into, well, a squirrel. But my form is actually pretty useful as I've realized. I jumped from tree to tree and after some experience it was really fun. The point is however that I thus came through the wards and all the other charms which Dumbledore surely has surrounded the castle to protect it. Outside of the castle I've waited then and then finally our owl came. She recognized me as well, came straight flying to me."

"Of course I've changed back before." Darco added quickly while Harry had to suppress a fit of laughter as he imagined Draco as a squirrel that jumped from tree to tree and sighed.

„ So they know definitely, where we are."

"Yes,"

"What is Dumbledore trying to achieve by intercepting our letters? He can't read them anyway, they're charmed after all. So what's the point of that?"

"No idea, Draco."

For a while they were silent. Going down the stairs which led to their dormitory Harry said,

"Caro asked me to help her finding the murderer of her father."

"Will you help her?"

„You don't seem to be surprised," Harry remarked.

"No, Caro already hinted such a thing while you were unconsciousness."

Harry nodded gloomily. They hurried the dark corridor along and for the first time Harry was asking himself why his friends had fled with him to Hogwarts so willingly.

As they entered their common room, they both stopped surprised.

"Caro? What are *you* doing here?"

Caro who was sitting, snuggled up in a blanket, near the fire, flinched.

“I couldn’t sleep. It seems to me that you could neither, could you?”

Harry and Draco went to the armchairs and sat down. Caro was holding something silvery in her hand and Harry just wanted to ask her what it was as Draco leaned back and looked at Caro,

“So, you’ve asked Harry to help you with searching for the murderer of your father?”

“Draco, don’t be insulted, now. I’m asking you as well, of course. I’ve only asked Harry first because I wasn’t sure if he would help me.” Caro said with an expression on her face which asked for forgiveness.

Harry skidded uncomfortably backwards.

„What’re you holding in your hand by the way?“ he asked.

The dark-grey eyes looked down and Caro laid the item on the table. Only now Harry saw that it was a tiny sword. While Caro was speaking, Harry’s feeling of resignation more and more increased.

The chance that he could bring Caro to forego her revenge was extremely small, he desperate realized. Her hate ran to deep. But what should he do, he couldn’t just say to her that he wouldn’t help her. Not after she had given Nell her freedom, not after she had freed Nell from the control of his adoptive father and had taken care that she escaped with them, not after she had always been there for him and had never ever let him down.

But for the time being Harry hadn’t time to occupy himself further with the question, what he would do then. Though the school caused him no difficulties, homework still wanted to be done. Furthermore he had problems with his Animagus form. Although he could change into a phoenix he couldn’t maintain the transformation for a longer period of time so far. This annoyed Harry greatly and that Draco hadn’t such problems with his squirrel form, made his mood worse additionally. Caro on the other hand seemed to have not the slightest talent and

Peter was desperate whenever they practiced in the Chamber of Secrets. But Caro still didn't manage to turn herself into an animal although Harry had tried to help her.

With his wand-less magic he had also not make any progress. It was always the same. Easy charms which didn't demand much power caused him no problems but such which counted to the more advanced, he wasn't able to perform. He didn't succeed in brining himself into the condition where he had broken the curses on their window either. He still remembered how he had felt his magic in that moment. Probably this only worked in emergencies, Harry thought angrily.

On top of that word had got out that they were real Quidditch talents and so they hadn't had a choice as to accept the offer to join the Slytherin team. The training sessions made more fun then Harry would ever admit and were a welcomed change but Marcus Flint, the captain of the team, had set his mind on winning the Quidditch cup by all means and set training session after training session so that they had even less time in the end. Harry didn't mind it however.

Caro had asked Peter if he knew where the Order was keeping their papers. But Peter had only shaken his head and said that it was much too long ago for him belonging to the Order. From him they had only discovered where Dumbledore's office was located but since Harry had already known since his conversation with the headmaster and should it really turn out that all documents were there, then it would be certainly impossible to get a hold of them. Caro however had been far apart from giving up and so Diamond now tried to find out something.

For one moment Harry had considered to not ask Diamond for this. But he understood Caro only too well. He had also wanted to find out by all means then who his mother was after all. Peter had strictly refused to go searching as well and Harry had only just barely been able to detain his friends from cursing Peter with the Imperius-Curse as the argument had escalated. Since the quarrel Peter hid mostly somewhere in the Chamber of Secrets and as the situation weren't complicated enough, Harry feared a catastrophe each time Caro and Hermione accidentally met, although this fortunately wasn't the case

very often since Caro was in the third class and thus had different lessons than they.

The hate which raged between Caro and Hermione, frightened Harry. Draco also didn't speak anymore with Hermione, Ginny and their friends. To Harry's surprise their identities were still a secret. Neither Hermione nor Ginny had revealed their secret although Harry suspected that the Order had something to do with this. And so only Harry and Ginny greeted each other if they met in the corridors. Occasionally they also talked to each other if they met in the library or outside by the lake. One time she asked him why Caro hated her as well. Harry looked up from his book which he had fetched a few minutes ago and said,

"Caro's father was murdered by some members of the Order of the Phoenix. She never got over it."

Ginny sustained his gaze, as she nodded,

"It's madness. This whole war. My grandparents were killed by Death Eaters. Actually I should hate you, shouldn't I? If I would think like Caro and Hermione but I don't hate. I know that it wasn't you who murdered my grandparents. I've never did anything to Caro and yet she looks at me full of hatred each time I see her."

The red-haired girl lowered her gaze and stacked some books on top of each other. Her voice was soft as she asked,

"Hermione has told me who you really are. Do you hate the Dark Lord? Was that the reason for your escape?"

Harry was silent while he thought how strange it was that no one else had ever asked him this question, apart from his adoptive father. Even Dumbledore had not asked him this question although he surely would have loved to know the answer and Sirius, Charlotte and the other adults seemed to treat everything what had to do with his past very carefully after he had refused to answer Sirius' questions. It was almost as they believed the less they spoke about the past years the more possible it was that he forget about it.

Although only Dumbledore had given him that impression Harry was sure that they expected from him that he would one day fight against the Dark Side whereas Caro and Draco believed that, though he wouldn't join the Dark Side, he would certainly not fight against the Dark Side either.

"No, I don't hate him. I didn't want to torture and to kill. That's why I escaped. But I don't hate him," he said finally. Looking up he was saw to his bewilderment that Ginny was smiling,

"I'm glad that you..."

"Ginny! Come here immediately!"

Harry turned around and realized that it had been Ginny's brother who had shouted so loudly. By his side Neville and Hermione were standing, who regarded him anything but friendly. Ginny cast him a glance, collected her book and went over to her friends. Nevertheless Harry heard how Ron Weasley hissed at his sister in a voice with overtones of uncomprehending speechlessness,

"He is a Death Eater! How can you talk with him?"

For one moment Harry considered to interfere but he believed that Ginny could handle this situation alone just fine. Shaking his head he looked at Ginny's empty place. It was strange, somehow he had this scaring feeling more and more often that this red-haired girl who was nearly one year younger than him seemed to understand him best. Harry who thought that this was almost a betrayal of Caro and Draco stood up and set off to the Chamber of Secrets while it crossed his mind that it was actually senseless to hate someone only because he belonged to one group with which you associated something particular.

Caro hated because her father had been murdered; Draco hated, well the reason for Draco's behaviour was incomprehensible for Harry, though his parents had ram into him to hate all those who didn't stand on the Dark Side, but he had been raised in such a way as well; Hermione hated because she had lost her parents and only spoke with him for the sake of Sirius, if it was inevitable and if Sirius was present, otherwise Hermione never addressed him; Sirius and Remus

hated Peter because he had betrayed his parents and his adoptive father hated nearly everyone. The reason for that was as well a complete mystery for Harry. Deeply lost in thoughts Harry sauntered the corridor along. Actually Caro and Hermione should have to understand each other, he thought. They had both lost their fathers after all. Why, Harry asked himself, was he not filled with such a hate?

Was it that why because the one who had his parents on his conscience was his adoptive father and he had never known his real parents? Harry tried to remember when he had begun to question the beliefs of his adoptive father. Had it been as he had found out that he was a Potter? Harry shook his head. No, he had already earlier thought about this. Nell, he thought, he had never seen Nell as a slave and thus the first doubt had risen in him if what his adoptive father told him was right. Harry went through the portrait and turned into a phoenix. He had not the slightest desire to walk downstairs.

In the meanwhile he had finally managed it and could now change into a phoenix for as long as he wanted. Arriving in the library he searched for books which had wand- less magic as their content. Reaching for a little book, something fell out as he opened the book. Curiously Harry bent down. It was a photo. Harry gasped for breath. In the first moment he thought that it was his mother but then he saw that the young woman, who winked at him, had amber eyes and also her features were different. Harry turned the photo around and read what stood there in faded handwriting.

Meet me today in the library. 10 pm.

Cathy

Harry didn't know why but he put the photo back in the book and let it disappear in one of his pockets. While he continued to search, his thoughts lingered still on the photo and he wondered who that girl had been.

The weeks passed and in November they had their first Quidditch match against Ravenclaw. Thanks to Harry, who played as Seeker

and to Caro and Draco who played as Chasers, they won with a lead of 150 points and over night they rose considerably in the Slytherin's esteem. While being busy with Quidditch and homework, Harry continuously feared that Diamond or Caro and Draco who had tried recently to spy after some Order members could find out where the archives were and before Harry noticed it, it was Christmas.

Unlike Jamie, Lizzie and Remus' children who were happy and excited, Harry felt rather uneasy. Alison, who had joined them with her daughter, stared with gloomy face at the festively decorated Christmas tree and each time Harry's eyes fell on her, he felt feelings of guilt rising in him. It wasn't your fault that Snape went back, he told himself sternly.

Caro and Draco seemed to feel uncomfortably as well and Charlotte who noticed the tension spared no effort but she didn't succeed very well in lightening the mood. Harry caught himself wishing that Ginny would celebrate with them instead of her family. As Sirius fetched a few photo albums, Harry was glad about the distraction.

Harry listened also devoutly to the stories which Sirius with some support of Remus told and suddenly he felt fierce affection for his godfather and Remus as they spoke full of warmth of James and Lily Potter, his parents.

Looking at a picture Harry frowned. It showed the wedding of his parents, his mother in a bright white dress stood arm in arm with his father. But Harry's gaze was riveted on the portal in front of which his parents were standing. The coat of arms that was attached to the gate he recognized immediately. It was the picture which was showed on his little box he had found in Godric's Hollow; an ocean of flames which surrounded a golden 'P'.

„Where is this?“ he asked and pointed towards the picture.

“That was in Terley; the castle of the Potters, for centuries in their possession. Lily and James bought Godric's Hollow after their wedding. They wanted to have a small house and Lily fell immediately in love with Godric's Hollow. So they moved there.”

Harry nodded and while slowly leaving through the pages, his thoughts still lingered on the just discovered information. Thanks to the little children it still became a nice feast for Harry and he had to smile as he saw how Lizzie fell asleep in Draco's arms. The little one had twisted his friend round her little finger quite a lot.

Caro talked in the meanwhile with Charlotte and Harry was relieved that Caro didn't seem to feel any dislike to Charlotte at least. Emily fed her son while Hermione fooled around with Jamie and little Meggie.

Sirius played chess with Remus and suddenly Harry felt sad and excluded what was absurd but without wanting it he had to think of his adoptive father who was sitting now in his dark castle. Harry knew that he wouldn't celebrate. They had never celebrated Christmas and Harry felt a strange mixture of pity and longing and realized that he missed him. He murdered my parents, he tortured Nell and he wanted to force me to torture and to kill and he only wanted to use me, Harry said to himself so why didn't he hate him? That would simplify everything so much. He should hate him and yet, there he was missing him! Harry cast a glance at the others, stood up then and went out of the room. He climbed up one of the towers and sauntered along the battlements and noticed that it had begun to snow,

Inhaling the cold air, he sighed. How peaceful the night was. He leaned against the battlements and stared up into the dark, black sky.

"Merry Christmas, Harry."

Harry turned happily around. Ginny's voice he would have recognized everywhere. She wore a hood, yet in the moonlight he could see that she smiled at him.

"Isn't the snow beautiful?" she whispered and Harry looked down on her palm. In the dim moonlight the snowflakes were glistening and an idea occurred to Harry. Taking his wand he began to whisper and while Ginny was looking at him astonished, the snowflakes fit together and glistening in a blinding white they curled themselves around Ginny's wrist.

„Oh, Harry, that is beautiful!“ Ginny said and looked down at her bracelet.

“Thank you so much but I’ve nothing for you.”

Harry shook his head.

„Never mind.“

He had just said this as Rainbow landed gracefully on the castle wall. Harry lifted one hand and stroked over the black feathers.

“So, you’re finally back again.”

Ginny who startled had stepped back as his phoenix had unexpectedly appeared, came again closer and reached out as well while Rainbow was softly trilling.

Chapter 27

March 1993

Silvery laugh rang out and her amber eyes brightened up. She reached for him and he grasped her little hand in his. Spinning around in circles, her dark-red hair was glistening like flames in the light of the sunrise. She let go of him and began to run. One moment he remained staying, gazed after her lithe figure and followed her then. Quickly he caught up with her, but she got away from him playfully. Her laughter disappeared. Her dark eyes filled with tears, which ran down her cheeks like little shimmering pearls. She began to fade and suddenly he was alone. She had disappeared.

With a start he opened his eyes. He needed a moment to realize where he was. The dream had been so real. After so many years, why did he dream of her now of all times? While staring into the darkness, his lips formed a name; a name he had buried deep within himself for a long time. Cathy, he thought and he was powerless against the memories which rose in him.

Harry gazed nervously to the door, riveted his eyes on Caro shortly afterwards and whispered,

“Did you find anything?”

Without looking up, Caro shook her head.

“No, not yet. If you would help me, it certainly would go quicker,” the black-haired girl replied and bent deeper over a sheet of parchment which she was holding in her hands. Harry sighed, stepped to the table where he dropped his wand and began to study the shelves which were standing in front of him. On the thick files which lined up there only the year stood and as he saw how many files there were from the year 1988, he realized why Caro hadn’t found anything yet. Reaching for one file, he opened the first page and stopped hesitatingly.

It had taken them long until they had discovered that the archives of the Order of the Phoenix were located near Dumbledore's office and even longer they had needed to wait until an opportunity had arisen to sneak in there without anyone missing them. Today finally a major part of the Order had left Hogwarts for fighting, lessons had been cancelled in the afternoon and so Caro and Harry had seized the opportunity. They had been forced to leave Draco behind since he had landed himself with detention. Remus Lupin, the teacher in Defence against the Dark Arts had had the bright idea to let them work together in pairs and Draco had got Ron Weasley as a partner. That however had turned out to be a great mistake. Before Harry would have been able to prevent it both had stood facing each other in a duel.

Since Caro hadn't wanted to pass this opportunity under no circumstances, they had dressed warmly, had gone for a walk in the snow and had waited near the right window until no one had been in sight. As soon as the air had been clear Harry had changed into a phoenix. Caro had charmed herself invisible and so they had flown to the window.

Harry stared at the many files and cursed the Order that it had been so carelessly to not put any protection charms on the windows. In such a case he perhaps could have still found an excuse and could have talked Caro out of breaking in here. But so he hadn't had a choice as to come along. The faster they would disappear from here the better, Harry thought but first they had to find for what they had come here. Harry pulled himself together and began to read. A little later he was so absorbed that he neither heard how Caro took abruptly a breath, nor the door which opened. The angry voice which suddenly rang out startled him so much that he dropped the file.

"How dare you!"

Before Harry knew what happen to him the wizard who, dressed with a scarlet cloak, had to belong to the members of the Order, had hit Caro with a curse. While Caro sank to the ground, Harry leaped to his wand. But the red light which was speeding towards him, didn't give him a possibility to grab his wand anymore. He wrenched his hands up and felt the magic surrounding him. As the curse of his attacker hit

his protection shield, the power of the impact caused him to stumble backwards.

The curse backfired. The man ducked down and the red buzzing light hit the heavy book-shelf that crashed down on the wizard. Harry was paralyzed for a moment. With trembling hands he grabbed his wand and with a shaking movement the shelf got up again. The books also flew back to their places. Harry ran to Caro, threw himself next to her and tried to waken her with the Ennervate charm. Relief rushed through him as Caro opened her eyes, sat up and stared at him with a dazed expression. For one instant Harry hugged Caro fiercely to himself. Then he helped her up. Caro's eyes burned angrily, as she reached for her wand and walked over to their attacker who was lying motionless on the ground. A little later, Caro said,

"He is dead."

Harry's eyes widened and he looked down on the silent figure while everything seemed to start blurring before his eyes. Caro stood up and seized Harry's arms.

"Harry, he has attacked us! You had to defend yourself."

"Caro, it just happened. I didn't want it. My magic....I had no...the book-shelf collapsed." he stammered and stared at her with wide eyes.

"I didn't want to kill him."

"I know, Harry." She said absent-minded while frantically thinking what to do now. Looking at Harry, she said urgently,

"Harry, we have to disappear as soon as possible from here. If someone sees us here..."

As Caro had evoked the devil with her loudly said remark, the door abruptly flung open.

"Alfred, what's taking you..."

The young man with the red hair, broke up, stared at them and clapped a hand to his mouth. Before he could react in some way however Caro had pointed her wand on him. As he fell to the floor, Harry seemed to wake up out of his lethargy for the first time.

“Caro! What shall we only do?”

Both looked at each other, searching for help. Harry ran a trembling hand through his hair.

“He’ll betray us.” He realized with suppressed panic in his voice.

„ We could put a memory charm on him.” Caro suggested and Harry nodded hesitantly.

Caro, who saw that Harry wouldn’t do anything, gripped her wand more tightly and sighed. She had the funny feeling that forgetting charms didn’t function on unconsciousness persons. It was Charlie’s brother she saw a moment later and while she still hesitated, Caro heard steps and murmur. Her gaze flickered to the open door, to Harry who stood there with a strange absent look and to her wand. She spun around and grabbed Harry’s arm.

“Transform, Harry, quick.“

Harry however only stared at her helplessly. Caro cursed, snatched the one file, grabbed once more Harry’s hand and pulled him to the door. They had hardly passed through the door, as a shrill loud alarm signal rang out that began to echoed through the castle with an ear-deafening sound. Startled Caro and Harry flinched. As they stormed down the corridor Caro didn’t need to drag Harry behind her any longer.

Remus who pushed his way trough the door with the other Order members, halted abruptly as he saw the Dark Mark which was hovering in the air in the middle of the room. In the light of the sunrise the bracelets flung around the wrists of the wizards and witches flashed.

The shrill alarm signal stopped but no one of the members who stood there like frozen became aware of this one bit. Finally movement came into the crowd and the first kneeled down on the ground. Fear and shock entered their faces as they realized that both wizards were dead. Remus stumbled to the table and bent down heavily. With sleepwalking slowness he stared at the scarf which he was holding in his hands. Charlotte had given the children among other presents scarves to Christmas and as he saw now the embedded' H in the green material, he felt how he froze.

Harry and Caro came only to a halt in front of the entrance of the Slytherins, completely out of breath, where they met Draco who looked relieved as he caught sight of them.

“What happened? As the alarm rang out, Lupin allowed me to go. I’ve feared already that they’ve discovered you.”

„We’ll explain everything later. But first we’ve to leave the castle as soon as possible.“

While Caro ran in her dormitory, Draco followed Harry with a rather confused expression on his face. His second attempt to find out what had happened, failed as well since Harry only shook his head. Harry, who in the meantime clumsily packed his things tried with all his might not to think of what had just taken place. The little wooden box he had found in Godric’s Hollow three and a half years ago fell out of his hands.

It hit the ground, the cover slid aside and the content scattered on the thick, soft carpet. Ordering Nell, who rang her hands with wide worried eyes to pack on, he hurriedly picked up the things and stuffed them back into the box. As he collected the necklace with the black stone he had found also in the ruins of Godric’s Hollow he halted and following an impulse he slipped it over. Immediately he felt how immense warmth surrounded him which strangely seemed to comfort him. Still wondering about this he found himself a moment later together with Draco and Nell in the Slytherin common room where they waited for Caro.

It didn't take long until she appeared. As they ran across the grounds of Hogwarts Draco tried once more to discover the reason for their sudden escape. While Caro, gasping for breath, set Draco into the picture of what had happened in short version, they reached the wall of wards which shielded Hogwarts from the remaining world. They stopped and Caro leaned forwards, her hands pressed against her sides and with a red face.

"How on earth shall we go through? We don't have any bracelets," she moaned loudly.

"We could go through in our Animagi forms, but not you." Draco said who still hadn't really understood what actually had happened. Caro cast him a look which spoke volumes.

Harry had remembered something in the meantime.

"We've forgotten Peter!"

Now it was him who Caro stared at.

„And? Do you want to run back now? Try to think of something how to get through!"

"There is someone going," Draco remarked. Caro whirled around.

„What did I say? Perhaps he can borrow us a bracelet."

Harry closed his eyes and waited for his two friends to return while he had the more and more increasing feeling to stick in a terrible nightmare.

„He had one!" Draco explained triumphantly and held the slender silver band up. Harry nodded only.

He just wanted to reach out for the bracelet, as a movement caught his attention.

"Peter!" Harry said relieved and let the rat disappearing in his pocket. They reached out their hands, touched the piece of jewellery and passed the wards. In the same instant the bracelet solved into thin air

but no one of them paid much attention to it as they began to hurry. In Hogsmeade, near the Shrieking Shack, they came to an abrupt halt.

"Where are we going actually?" Draco asked and cast a look at Caro and Harry.

"Does anyone have a suggestion?" he added.

Caro glared at him angrily.

"Knockturn Alley. We search for a little hotel and then we see on. Come, Harry."

While they were flying it started to rain. Heavy, cold raindrops lashed in Harry's face but he didn't make any attempt to pull up his cloak.

It was late in the evening as they arrived in Knockturn Alley. Wet and frozen to the bone they hurried through the narrow street and searched for a little hotel. In front of a little old house they stopped. The letters on the sign were already peeled off which swung gloomily back and forth in the wind. The room, which the owner showed them after some Galleons, was tiny and shabby. For a temporary accommodation it would be enough however.

Harry dropped on the next best bed and shuddered. Caro and Draco also sank on the beds. Rainbow trilled sadly and Nell's eyes looked enormous as she scared crunched down on the blanket. Finally Draco said,

"Could someone perhaps finally tell me what exactly happened? I have understood only half of it what you've tried to tell me earlier, Caro."

Caro looked over to Harry.

"Well..."

"You can tell him," Harry said flatly and standing up, he stepped to the window and looked out into the darkness which occasionally was brighten up by dim lights.

Caro sighed, rose as well, went to the chimney and while she made use of her wand to get a fire going, she slowly told what had happened. As Caro had come to the part where they had realized that their attacker was dead, Harry clenched his fists, so tightly that his nails left bloody half-moons in his palms.

As Caro had ended, Draco shook his head.

“My goodness....so you haven’t found out anything about the murderer of your father?”

Caro hesitated one moment, shook then her head and said,

“No, unfortunately not.”

She stepped to Harry and laid a hand on his arm.

“Harry, he attacked us. You had to defend yourself.”

Furiously Harry spun around.

“I’ve murdered him! Can’t you understand what that means?”

“Harry...” Caro said helplessly.

“I bet that he would have murdered you had you given him a chance. Harry, don’t take it too seriously.” Draco threw in.

Harry stared speechless at his friend.

“That is not the point at all. That is...”

Harry broke up and was silent, went to his bed and sat down. Draco stood up and took care of a poor supper. Although Caro tried to convince Harry to eat a bit Harry only drank a little tea. Shortly afterwards he laid on his bed and turned his face towards the wall.

Sometime, in the middle of the night, Harry felt the urgent need to laugh. He snorted in the pillow to not waking up Caro and Draco. It shook him so fiercely that you could think he suffered from the shivers. There his adoptive father tried to bring him to step in his footsteps for all the years and to learn how to torture and kill and he

resisted fiercely and now he had committed a murder. His adoptive father would surely have been proud if he would have done this deed in his presence. As the laughter ebbed, a desperate sobbing rose in him while he saw again and again how the book-shelf fell down on the wizard. Trying to sleep was pointless.

The following day promised to become foggy and dully. The breakfast went silently. No one really knew what to say.

“What will we do now? We can’t stay here forever,” Draco dared to break the silence.

Harry, who had eaten only little and who was completely overtired, went to his things and fished the wooden box out. Holding it in his hand, he remembered last Christmas.

„Terley,“ he whispered and without any warning he was overcome by the strange and highly disconcerting feeling to fly through the air with a terrific speed. Harry fell hard on the ground. Dazed he clambered to his feet and froze while beginning to doubt his senses. The little room of the inn had disappeared, also neither Caro nor Draco could be seen anywhere. Harry stared awed up to the tremendous castle which soared into the sky on the little hill. He looked up to the gate. In the middle of the iron bars the crest of the Potters was set: fiercely flickering flames and in their midst a golden ‘P’. His mind began to understand. The wooden box he still was holding in his hand had to be a port key. Sighing Harry began to walk towards the gate.

That had been all he needed. How should he now return again? Somehow he had the feeling that his box wouldn’t transport him back to the uncomfortable hotel. He reached out a hand in the direction of the iron bars and hardly had he touched them the gate swung open. Stunned Harry walked through. Running up the little hill, he stopped, having arrived on the top with wide eyes. The ocean stretched itself so incredibly far in front of him. Foaming waves broke themselves at the beach. Harry inhaled the air and tasted salt. The wind was heavy but Harry stretched out his arms and braced himself against it absorbed in the sight of the ocean which he had never seen before. How beautiful the ocean was. For one moment he forgot everything around him as he looked at the incredibly width.

Then he reached slowly into his pocket and fetched out his wand. Thoughtful he regarded it an instant and remembered involuntarily the wand shop, where he had bought his wand and his adoptive father had murdered the shop owner. Swinging his arm back he threw his wand down the cliffs. His eyes followed his wand fall and then he watched how he was swallowed from the white foaming waves. From now on, he vowed, he would never again use his magic, neither with his wand nor without it. Harry stood there, on the cliffs, for a long time and stared at the sea.

As he finally turned around the pictures of his parents' wedding came into his mind. Sighing he climbed up the stairs and halted in front of the portal which was also decorated with the family crest. He reached out his hand once more and like before the winged doors opened and let him enter.

With thumping heart he stepped over the threshold. Harry's timid steps echoed loudly through the great hall. His gaze slid up to the arched, artfully decorated ceiling, to the broad staircase which led to the upper floors, to the corridors which branched from the hall and to the walls where countless pictures hung and finally to a little table which was standing in one of the corners where a bunch of red roses was standing in a vase. Harry crossed the hall and stepping nearer he saw that they were real flowers. A shudder seized him. Who had put the roses here? Looking down on the floor he also realized that he could see nowhere any dust. He looked to the stairs and said to himself that it was unlikely that danger would threaten him here if he would draw attention to himself and even if, it didn't play a role anymore.

"Hello? Is there anyone here?" he shouted and did several steps forward.

As a thin voice rang out, his heart nearly stopped beating. Spinning around, he saw a little creature standing in front of him which bowed deeply. With large eyes it stared at him.

"Master has called?"

Harry nodded relieved. How stupid of him not to think immediately of house-elves. Then an idea struck him.

“You wouldn’t know by chance how I could get back to Knocktoun Alley, would you?”

The house-elf inclined her head.

“You could use the chimney, master.”

A little moment later Harry stood in front of a marvellous chimney and reaching for the floo powder that was in a silvery bowl the house-elf handed to him, he looked once more around. Here they would be able to stay and forget the events which had taken place yesterday but in the same moment Harry knew that he never would be able to.

“No!”

Sirius hit his fist against the wall while everything in him refused to believe that Harry had betrayed them so. But whichever way he looked at it, it didn’t change anything at the facts. Harry had been in the archives of the Order, it was hardly possible that the scarf had got there by accident and then the escape during they had had cursed Felix and had stolen his bracelet. Felix had identified the three without a doubt.

If they were innocent of the crime they wouldn’t have fled. The bitter feeling he had for being betrayed was so much stronger as then. Peter had been his friend but Harry he had loved, he had been his godson.

‘Why? Why did you do this, Harry?’

Only when Charlotte began to speak, he realized that he had spoken it aloud,

“Sirius, we don’t know what exactly happened. Perhaps...”

Sirius whirled around.

„What? What do you want to say, Charlotte? That it hadn’t been Harry? His scarf was there and apart from that they came through the

window, probably he turned into a phoenix and Alfred and Bill are dead, murdered and the Dark Mark was hovering exactly in the middle. Of course Harry knows how to conjure it up and little later they attack Felix and flee! If they hadn't anything to do with the murders, then they hardly would have left the castle so hurriedly!"

„Sirius...“ Charlotte tried to say but her husband looked at her with an expression in his eyes that clearly said she should be silent, spun around and marched out of the room. The door crashed loudly shut. Charlotte sighed and cursed Sirius' stubbornness. It was right, she thought, all evidence pointed towards Harry and his friends being the culprits, at least Harry and Caro since Draco had been under Remus' supervision. Nevertheless she found that the events made no sense.

She was aware of it and had not forgotten it one time that Harry had grown up under Voldemort's care but she doubted it strongly that it had been Voldemort's plan to kill an Auror who even hadn't a high rank within the Order and a young man which had begun to work for the Order only a short time ago. Strangely no one wanted to hear this. Apart from that she didn't understand what the children had wanted in the archives. To spy and to find out their planned tactics and their newest strategies in the war it would have been much more logical to break into Akbus' office which was simultaneously the assembly room for his closest confidants. Those thoughts no one wanted to her as well.

She didn't try after all to amiss the events as not so tragic, she was shocked and speechless the same as the others but she had grown fond of Harry and now she should have been completely wrong about him? She thought back to Christmas, how sad and at the same time so unbelievable eager he had looked as Sirius and Remus had told him stories about his parents. Could it really be that Harry was capable of murder? She couldn't believe it, didn't want it, but neither Sirius nor Dumbledore, yes not even Remus who had been always so sensible, wanted to listen to her if she said that it didn't make any sense. Perhaps Charlotte thought the feeling of disappointment and betrayal went to deep. Sirius had loved Harry so much and Dumbledore as well, Charlotte was sure of it.

And they all had been so happy as Harry had appeared in Hogwarts with his friends. Sadly she sighed and stood up. Snatching a warmer cloak she set off to the lake. She needed a bit fresh air. Arriving at the portal shortly afterwards and inhaling the cold air, she shook her head. If the three had murdered Albus, she would have understood it. Voldemort would have let his worst adversary be eliminated by three children; that would have been an ingenious plan and she could quite believe the Dark Lord to be capable of doing this, but Alfred and Bill?

Involuntarily thinking of how Sirius had found Harry and his friends, she shook her head. Had been everything only theatre then? But Harry had been magically overexerted and had glowed. There must have had been a reason for this. Something she had to do, Charlotte decided, she only hadn't the faintest idea what. Looking over to the lake she saw Ginny, Hermione's best friend, sitting on the shore. For one moment she wondered why Ginny was sitting by the lake in such a cold; then her thoughts occupied themselves again with the confusing situation which had broken over them so unexpectedly.

Ginny looked motionless at the lake. The water was more grey than blue and also the waves which sloshed on the shore were higher than usual. The wind which was blowing against Ginny's face was fierce and she was cold in her much too thin robe. She hadn't thought of taking a warmer cloak. Tears ran down her cheeks.

She couldn't believe it that her brother was dead. Bill, she thought and her heart clenched painfully. Suddenly she looked down on the white glistening bracelet which was flung around her wrist. She had never told anyone who had given it to her. Not even Hermione knew of the charmed Christmas night where she had met Harry high up on one of the towers. She couldn't explain it, but she clung with all her might she was capable of to the certainty that Harry hadn't been it. As the alarm had rung out she had been in the library and had looked for books with Hermione that could help them by one of their homework.

She had been worried but only when Charlie had come to her with ashen face she had realized that something terrible must have happened. Only bit by bit she had discovered what had happened.

Harry, Caro and Draco had disappeared into thin air and everyone thought them guilty. Only she didn't believe it. The reason for this she wouldn't have been able to explain but she knew deep down in her heart that Harry hadn't done it. Raising her hand, she put her cheek on the coolly bracelet and forlorn she stared at the lake.

Chapter 28

October 1993

Silvery fog had surrounded the beach as Harry followed the narrow path which wound itself through the high cliffs. On this morning also the ocean was foaming and Harry raised his face up and felt the wind. Since Harry had come to Terley for the first time, he had loved the ocean which appearance was never the same but always changed.

He liked it particularly when the ocean stormed and the white spray broke against the beach. Slowly sauntering along the beach Harry realized surprised that he had felt indeed happy for one moment. Immediately afterwards the feelings of guilt crashed upon him which haunted him persistently. He knew that Caro and Draco didn't understand him but he just couldn't forget the events which had taken place in the archives of the Order.

Restlessly Harry quickened his space. At this place he could have been happy. In Terly he felt secure and the many pictures of his ancestors which hung in the castle on the walls gave him the feeling to be at home. If there hadn't been his memories which haunted him and his conflicting feelings for the people he had left in Hogwarts and for his adoptive father from whom he had fled. Angrily Harry walked even more rapidly. He didn't want to think of it once again. He began to run. It was difficult in the sand but like so often before he forced himself to run faster and faster.

On top of the cliffs a lithe figure stood and looked down. While Caro's black hair fluttered in the wind, her dark grey eyes were riveted sadly on Harry who was continuously moving faster afar. She knew why he ran and why he overexerted himself to exhaustion each time he did so. She knew it and nevertheless she couldn't do anything to help him. Even, after almost a half year Harry's feelings of guilt hadn't decreased. Since that fateful day he hadn't been himself anymore and since then he also hadn't performed one single charm. Somehow Harry seemed to blame his magic.

She had told him countless times that it had been an accident but this all had been of any use. As she thought of the reproaches she made herself that the search for her father's murderers had been the cause

for their escape and Harry's unhappiness she pulled a face. Why couldn't she have been the one to kill their attacker? She was convinced of it that no feelings of guilt would have plagued her. The unexpected attack had to her dismay so surprised her however that she hadn't been capable of defending herself. And to think that she was the older one, she should have protected Harry and not Harry her. Furthermore she hadn't even managed to reveal the murderer of her father and to get revenge on him.

Though she knew who had fought against her father and his companions on that day, she didn't know however who of them had her father on his conscience. She looked again to Harry. She had never told him that she had found the right file then – she knew he hadn't seen that she had taken it with her – and the reason for this was mainly that Sirius Black as well had belonged to the group which had tried to defeat the followers of the Dark Lord. She didn't know exactly though which feelings Harry had towards his godfather but should he indeed be the one who had murdered her father she was sure that this time Harry wouldn't help her. Shaking her head she sighed. She would never get an opportunity to meet with the members of the Order again anyway. The chance that she would ever enter Hogwarts again was uttermost slim.

"In which thoughts are you absorbed?"

Caro was startled and saw Draco with a grinning face standing in front of her. Around his shoulders he had slung a towel. Ignoring his question, she stared unbelievably at him,

"You want to go swimming?"

„Yes, why not? It's not cold after all. Only a bit foggy.“, he answered and began to run down the path.

Caro shook once more her head and pulled up her shoulders. The water would have been too cold to her but Draco had to know it after all. Sighing she turned around and began to go back to the castle.

As he opened his eyes and stared in the impenetrable darkness of his cell he didn't manage to remember his dream. Desperately he

tried to concentrate. He had the feeling that it was of paramount importance that he succeeded in remembering his dream. The effort drove him bead of perspiration on his forehead.

A picture of ocean-blue eyes rose in him. Had he dreamed of them? He couldn't connect anything to those blue eyes; they didn't even seem familiar to him but why had he then the scary strange feeling that those ocean-blue beautiful eyes were the key against his oblivion and the more and more increasing darkness?

The hoods of their cloaks pulled deeply over their heads Caro and Harry hurried through Hogsmeade. It was late in the evening and it already began to get dark. Since Caro had ascertained that their supplies were again used Caro and Harry had set off to Hogsmeade to go shopping. Draco was lying in Terley with fever. Why he had had to go swimming in such weather? Caro asked herself annoyed while rummaging the shelves for the ingredients of a healing potion. Though Rainbow's healing magic was incredible great to heal broken bones, it didn't help against simple colds.

"Hurry up," Harry hissed impatiently.

"We should have better gone to Knockturn Alley, I think, like usual. There the chance to be recognized is minimal after all."

"There you don't have any possibility to buy ingredients for healing potions. And you didn't want to go to Diagon Alley. Besides I've found already the right things," Caro said and a little while later they had left the shop.

"Was that all now?"

Caro nodded.

„Yes.“

As they almost had reached the Shrieking Shack, Caro's eyes fell on a few shadowy figures which could be seen in the cover of a couple

of trees and abruptly she came to a halt. A man was tossing on the ground and for one moment she caught a glimpse of his face.

“Harry! It’s Charlie Weasley! We have to help him!” she whispered breathlessly and grabbed Harry’s arm. Harry stared at her.

“How are we supposed to do this? They are too many,” he replied, cursed then and ran in direction of the Death Eaters. Caro followed while wondering confused what she actually was doing. She could not fight against the Dark Side, under no circumstances, could she?

Harry slipped off his hood.

“Stop to torture the prisoner! Immediately!”

“Zabini, my father wants him alive.”

One moment Caro believed that Harry had lost his senses. Then she realized that Harry had recognized one of the Death Eaters. As far as the Death Eater was concerned he had recognized Harry as well, at least judging by his reaction. Bowing deeply, the wizard ordered his inferiors to stop.

“You can go. We will bring the prisoner to Arreton’s,” Harry said peremptorily, a golden aura seemed to surround him. Caro blinked astonished. As by a miracle the Death Eaters obeyed. Shortly afterwards they had disappeared and Harry slumped against a tree.

“I would have never thought that this would function,” he said weakly while he still couldn’t believe it that he had remembered the name and the followers of his adoptive father had indeed obeyed him. Shaking his head, he said,

“They must have managed it somehow to keep our disappearance a secret. Otherwise they would have never...”

“Harry, help him!” Caro cut him off who had bent over Charlie in the meantime and had lifted the Silencing Charm. Caro ran a hand over his forehead and Harry studied her surprised. Never before had he seen such an expression in her dark-grey eyes.

Pushing himself off the tree, he raised one eye-brow.

“You love him, don’t you?”

Caro jumped up.

“No, I don’t.”, she nearly screamed and turned around.

Harry shook his head and changed into a phoenix. It didn’t take long and Charlie sat up heavily. Harry had only taken care of the major wounds.

Knowing that his father, should he hear of the events, would come immediately to this place, he didn’t want to lose unnecessarily time.

“Charlie, you have to return to Hogwarts as soon as possible. Quick!”

He helped Charlie up who blinked at him.

“Harry?” he choked out with a husky voice.

“Before they’ll come back, Charlie, go!”

Harry gazed at him intently and saw a strange expression in Charlie’s light brown eyes, an expression he couldn’t interpret. But to his relief he turned around and began to stagger into the direction of Hogwarts.

While more or less running Charlie turned around for one more time and for an instant his eyes lingered on the girl, which now stood next to Harry and he remembered how he had met her for the first time and her dark eyes had stared at him and had captured him. Looking again straight on, his thoughts occupied themselves with the question why Harry had saved his life. He couldn’t understand it. Arriving finally in Hogwarts, his sister came towards him. She stopped and her eyes widened,

„You’re injured!“ and wanted to reach out with her hand to his cheek which a bloody scratch decorated.

“It’s nothing bad.” He answered hurriedly and ducked out of her way.

Ginny regarded him sceptically and asked,

“What happened?”

„I bumped into some Death Eaters. I already thought that this would be my end. But suddenly Harry appeared and ordered them to stop. He's saved my life. Can you believe that?”

„I just don't understand it. Why did he do this?” he wondered, shaking his head and walked next to Ginny up to the castle.

Ginny grabbed her brother's hand and sent a thank you to Harry in her mind. So it had been justified after all to never believe that Harry had anything to do with the murders of Bill and Mr. Farle. For the first time since the death of her oldest brother she was happy and strangely elated. She looked up to one of the towers and smiling an idea occurred to her how her letter would reach Harry in any case. Hardly had they passed the tremendous portal, a wizard dressed with the scarlet robe which every member of the Order wore, run towards them and gasped,

“Charlie, there you are. We have a new assignment. We shall come immediately to Alastor.”

“You belong into the hospital wing, Charlie. You just can't throw yourself in another fight!” Ginny protested aghast.

Her brother shook his head and casting still a loving gaze at her, he followed his colleague. Ginny looked after them and prayed that Charlie would survive this new task. She knew that she wouldn't bear it to lose another one she loved.

As Harry stepped out of the library in the room where Caro and Draco who was feeling better thanks to the potion Caro had brewed and who had had to promise Caro to never go swimming again in such a weather, had made themselves comfortable, he saw that Rainbow had returned in the meantime from her excursion.

Caro handed him a letter.

„It's from Ginny,“ she said and frowned.

Surprised that Rainbow had brought him the letter; he tore the envelope and unfolded the parchment.

Harry,

I hope that you'll receive this letter. I had to write to you and I know that the school owls wouldn't reach you. That's why I waited so long until Rainbow would visit Fawkes. I wanted to thank you, to thank you that you saved Charlie's life.

Harry, I don't know what happened on that day where you escaped but I don't think it was you. I don't think it, I know it. I've never forgotten what you've told me by the lake and in the library. Please, Harry, come back and clarify what had happen then. Sirius Black is so unhappy since your escape. He didn't want to believe it in the beginning but as he saw the Dark Mark he broke down and since then he and all the others believe that it was you who murdered Bill and. Mr. Farle. Harry, please return. If not then let me at least know that you're all right. Please!

Ginny

Harry stared at the black letters and tried to understand what was written there. Without noticing it really he began to move and went out of the room. His way led him out, to the ocean. Walking down to the beach, he pulled his cloak tighter around him. It was cold and the wind lashed against his face and threatened to snatch the letter off his hand. He sat down on one of the stones and began to read the letter a second time. Which Dark Mark?

And Bill should be dead? How could that be? He concentrated his thoughts to the day where they had fled out of Hogwarts. His memory was vague and blurred in a fog. As Bill had come in, Caro had hit him with a curse. But had Caro really used the Killing Curse? That she would have never done, would she? Desperately Harry tried to remember the colour of the curse. He remembered that Caro had wanted to curse Bill with the memory charm so it couldn't be that she had killed Bill, he thought relieved. Harry stuffed the letter into his pocket and did several steps towards the ocean. But who then had

done it? Before he could continue to think about it, a timid voice startled him,

“Harry?”

Harry turned around and recognized Peter who just stepped on the beach. Harry walked towards him,

“What’s up?”

Peter’s gaze avoided his Harry suddenly realized and something seemed to worry him.

“Harry, I have to tell you something. I...I followed you then to the archives and I saw what happened there. As you left the archives I killed the two wizards. Your attacker was merely unconsciousness. You have not killed him, Harry. I did it and I cast the Dark Mark into the air,” he stammered with cracking voice.

Harry just wanted to reply angrily that he wouldn’t believe this lie, as he froze.

“You’ve conjured the Dark Mark into the air?”, he croaked.

Peter nodded miserably.

In Harry’s head everything spun around, thoughts stormed at him and thinking of Ginny’s letter, he stared at Peter,

“You have killed them? But...but why?” he added as the little man nodded.

Harry got only the first half of the explanation which was told in a trembling voice and was hardly to understand as he jumped up with out any warning. Anger rose in him.

“You’ve killed them; you’ve killed Ginny’s brother because you were afraid to be discovered? Because you wanted to prevent that I would ever return to Hogwarts? Get out of my sight, get away from here. Never again come under my eyes.” it gushed out of Harry.

Peter stumbled backwards, with wide eyes. Harry turned around briskly and ran up the path. How could he dare? How could Peter dare to betray him in such a way?

Peter clambered to his feet and his eyes riveted on Harry who still was surrounded by this golden scary magic and who stormed up the cliffs. To see how the trust in the emerald eyes had abruptly crumbled, had hit him hard but he knew that it was for the best. He was glad that he had finally summoned up enough courage to speak with Harry; even if Harry would hate him from now on. The most important thing was however that Harry had believed him. Sighing Peter stared at the ocean.

The weeks in Hogwarts had been torture. The fear of being found out had increased from day to day. And one day he had met Remus in one of the corridors. Remus had stopped and for one moment Peter had believed that he had seen him. He knew that Sirius and Remus would kill him if they would find him. As he had witnessed then the happenings in the archives in his Animagus form, he had acted in a fraction of a second, before the door had flown open, before he could have thought of the consequences his action would have and above all what this would mean for Harry. He had known that Sirius would have forgiven an accident but not a murder.

Sinking to his knees he thought of his past and asked himself on which point of his life everything had begun to go wrong. Looking at the stormy ocean he made an oath and Peter knew that he would fulfil it one day, even if it cost his own life. Sometime he would pay his debt.

Harry stumbled along the narrow path and ran across the garden to the other side of the castle where he ran down again to the beach. How long he ran Harry didn't know, but at some point it became more and more difficult to run through the heavy, wet sand and finally he fell to his knees while gasping for breath. His heart was thumping and he felt dizzy. Over and over again he heard Peter's voice,

'It was me who murdered them.'

While the waves were breaking at the beach, he sat suddenly straight. I didn't kill him. Harry felt how the heavy burden of guilt was falling off him and he felt how a nearly cheery feeling seized him which however disappeared abruptly as he thought of Ginny and her brother Bill. Harry drew his knees to himself and slid his arms around them while riveting his eyes on the waves.

Night had already fallen as Harry rose with clammy body and returned to the castle. It had become icy and looking at the silvery bright moon that was just covered by passing clouds, he quickened his space. As he entered the great library and the comfortable warmth covered him, he sighed. At his entrance, Caro had jumped up.

"Harry! We were already worried...what happened?"

Sometimes, Harry thought and went to an armchair it would have been good if they didn't know each other so well. Draco who had covered himself tightly in a light green blanket looked up from his book and threw an investigating look at Harry who was too tired to invent a lie so he began to tell what had taken place on the beach.

As he had ended, he saw that Caro looked rather strange, she opened her mouth but pressed her lips tightly together immediately afterwards and avoided his eyes.

"Why did you let him escape?" Draco wanted to know, regarding him with a frown on his face.

"I don't know. I did not think of it...."

Draco shook his head uncomprehendingly.

Leaning back Harry saw to Caro and just wanted to ask her why she had looked at him so strangely, as Caro jumped up.

"It's already late. I'll take care of the supper," she said hurriedly and quickly left the library.

Harry gazed stunned after her. Take care of supper? Why should Caro of all people take care of the supper when Nell and the other house-elves always prepared the diverse meals? Before Harry could

however think on, Draco suggested to play a game of chess and over the exciting game, Harry forgot Caro's unexplainable behaviour and Peter's shocking revelations for the time being.

Only after they had said goodnight to each other and Harry had returned to his room and had closed the door behind him, he remembered that he still hadn't asked Caro what she had wanted to say before she had changed her mind. One moment he still hesitated but then he set off to Caro's rooms. Caro was surprised but he didn't let her any time. Without transition he asked,

"You wanted to say something earlier as I told this from Peter. What was it?"

Caro shook her head.

„It was nothing, Harry.“

Her face was rigid but Harry knew her well enough to know that she was hiding something. And sometimes it was good after all that they knew each other so well, Harry thought amused. Caro however remained silent and Harry had more and more the feeling that he had to know by all means what it was that Caro didn't want to tell him.

Taking her arm, he stared into her dark-grey eyes and tried to see her thoughts. Angrily she wrenched her arm out of his grip.

"That isn't fair, Harry.“

Harry sighed.

„Sorry, but it has something to do with Peter, hasn't it? You have been thinking of him now, Caro, we've never lied to each other and have kept secrets.“

Caro turned around to the window while Harry made a step forwards.

"Caro, please! What is it?"

There Caro turned around again and stared sadly at him. Harry thought back to her expression and asked softly,

“You think he lied to me, don’t you?”

“Yes. He was dead and Peter might have killed Ginny’s brother but not our attacker.”

Walking several steps towards her, Harry halted and run a hand over his forehead. Confused he looked at her,

“But why should he tell me such things then?”

“Oh, Harry. Didn’t you notice how worried we were about you? Perhaps Peter as well was worried and wanted to help you. Although I haven’t the faintest idea what he had thought of murdering Ginny’s brother but since he has told you and wanted to make you believe that he had killed our attacker as well, I think he wanted to fetch you out of your self-reproaches.”

Caro laid her arms around him.

“It was an accident, Harry. You can’t blame yourself and finally stop to reproach yourself. Then I had to drown into self-reproaches, it was me after all who brought you to go into the archives,” Caro said, pushed him a bit off her and looked at him.

Harry shook his head.

“Nevertheless it was my fault. If I wouldn’t have lost control over my magic...”

“Such nonsense, Harry! He would have killed us and apart from this you only defended yourself. Was it your fault that the book-shelve was standing there? If it was your fault, then it was mine as well. I have convinced you to accompany me to the archives. And Nell, Harry, I planned from the beginning to revenge my father and because of this I’ve given Nell her freedom. That you would help me. I thought that you couldn’t say no then,” Caro said in a rush.

Harry stared at her for a moment. He had completely forgotten what they had searched after then.

“And you haven’t even found out something,” he said quietly.

Caro cast an insecure glance at him.

“You are not angry? I mean because of Nell...”

“No, I know that you would have also done it if I would have asked you. And you didn’t leave Nell behind in Arreton that I’ll never forget you,” Harry said and one moment later he asked hesitantly.

“If you had found out who did it, would you really have killed him then?”

“Harry, I have to tell you something.”

Caro took a deep breath and began to relate what she had discovered in the archives. She spoke fast so that she couldn’t change her mind anymore. As she had ended, there was ghostly silence for a while. Harry’s face looked rigid in the dim light of the magical candles.

“So, it could have been Sirius,” he murmured.

“Yes.”

For a while they were silent and Caro asked herself if it wouldn’t have been better to keep her discovery a secret. Then Harry said without transition,

“I should have noticed that Peter feared to be found out, then...”

“No, Harry, no, you won’t blame yourself now that Ginny’s brother has been killed. Besides Peter could have said anything, if he wanted to leave Hogwarts, we surely hadn’t held him up. “

Harry sighed, pulled Caro close to him and hugged her tightly.

“Oh, Caro, why everything has to be so complicated?”

Caro laid her head against his shoulder and murmured,

“I don’t know, I don’t know, Harry.”

It was dark in the big library. Only in one of the corners a weak light was burning. Narcissa Malfoy smiled, while reading the letter a second time. Shortly afterwards she reached for the quill and a sheet of parchment and quickly begun to write. She didn't forget for a moment however to listened if it was still silent in the house. Under no circumstances Lucius was allowed to discover her. As she had finished writing, she stood up and hurried to the window. Gazing after the black phoenix Narcissa sighed. She missed Draco so much and would have given everything to be able to embrace him in this moment.

She had been so much afraid for Draco and neither Lucius nor Bella had been able to calm her, both had been incredibly angry over the disappearance of the children whereas the Dark Lord had been surprisingly calm and he still was it. As they had heard two days ago that Harry and Caro had helped one prisoner, he hadn't even punished the responsible Death Eaters, sure, they couldn't have known it – at the Dark Lord's behest the escape of the children had remained a secret – but if someone was to blame or not had never interested their master. It was almost as the Dark Lord would know something that was hidden to all the others, she thought. It seemed so that he was waiting on something and Narcissa couldn't get rid of the feeling that it wasn't anything good.

Only Draco's letters had calmed her down a bit, letters of which existence she had never told a soul. It had been luck that she had managed so far to hide the letters from Lucius. She was incredibly glad to know that the children were happy in Terley and above all there they weren't exposed to any danger, even the Dark Lord would not been able to find them there, Narcissa thought, whatever he seemed to be planning.

She had been more than relived as she had heard that the children had left Hogwarts. But now everything was all right after all and as long as Draco and Caro who she also missed were happy she was it as well, although she still didn't really understand the reason for their escape. Narcissa turned around and hurried back to her bedroom while thinking if it was perhaps possible to visit the children.

Harry threw himself repeatedly to the other side but his wish to find finally sleep didn't become true. He just couldn't calm down. Annoyed he pushed his blanket aside, he was so hot and the air in his room seemed to suffocate him. Going to the window, he tore it open. The air of the night was icy and after seconds he shivered. Surprised he noticed that Rainbow was nowhere to be seen. He shut the window and turning around, he stepped to his armchair and dropped himself into it. He drew his knees to himself, slid his arms around them and sighed.

Today just too much had happened, Harry thought. Ginny's letter, the confession of Peter, the feeling of relief that had seized him for so short a time and finally the feeling of resignation as he had spoken with Caro and as well the feelings of guilt which had overcome him again. After she had told him what she had found in the archives she had showed him the file and Harry's thoughts wandered to Sirius. He could have been it.

And again he wondered what actually the difference was between the Order and the followers of his adoptive father.

Thinking of Sirius and Charlotte, he felt a mixture of strange sadness and feelings of guilt, but anger as well that they believed so effortlessly in his guilt. He knew that he would never been able to explain why he had lost all control of his magic on this day and why in the end Ginny's brother and the other wizard hadn't been alive anymore. Who would believe him anyway?

Peter had probably disappeared over the hills and far away and Harry was sure that he wouldn't appear again in the distant future. But he didn't want to think of Peter now. There was however someone who didn't believe that he was guilty, a little voice in his head whispered to him. Warmth filled him as a picture of a red-haired girl rose in him. Remembering Ginny's dark-brown eyes, he sensed how he began to smile. She believed in him. As strange and unexplainable it was for him. One moment he sat completely still. Then he heaved a deep sigh.

It was rather unlikely that he would ever see her again.

A soft tapping jolted him out of his thoughts. Rising from his armchair, he went back to the window. It was Rainbow who returned from one of her excursions. Surprised he noticed that it had started to snow.

And to think that November hadn't even begun and a few days ago Draco had still swum in the ocean. Watching how the snowflakes slowly landed on the window seat, he remembered that he could do something after all to let Ginny know that he was all right. Hesitatingly he reached out to the snowflakes. He would break his vow but that didn't matter to him in this moment. Harry felt drained. He wished that he hadn't pressed Caro. But then Harry shook his head.

Would it have been better to live with a lie? Caro was right. It had been an accident. Even if he would never again use his magic, it wouldn't make him alive again, just as little as Ginny's brother. Apart from this he had realized in all clearness two days ago as he had helped Charlie Weasley that he would do magic as soon as it was necessary. And it would be of any use for no- one if he sank into self-reproaches, he said to himself defiantly.

In addition it wasn't possible to sent Ginny his little surprise, with which he had just come up, without magic. Shortly afterwards he stroked Rainbow's wet feathers and shook his head.

„And you have fallen in love with Fawkes, haven't you?" he asked his phoenix. That he had missed this entirely, must have been because he had been too occupied to rack his brain over other things. Rainbow trilled conformingly and cuddled her head to his shoulder. Harry smiled and as Rainbow had flown again out to bring Ginny her present, he remained staying at the window and stared into the darkness.

Chapter 29

August 1994

Alison Snape walked along the shore of the lake and smiled as she heard the cheerful laugh of her daughter which rang out to her. Hermione, Ginny, Ron and Neville had got a little boat from somewhere and Lizzie, Jamie and little Meggie, Emily's and Remus' daughter, had obviously insisted on coming along. Winking at the children, she walked on. It was in such moments as those where she had enough leisure to let her thoughts wander around in which she missed Severus with tormenting intensity. Not to know if he was still alive was hardly bearable, just as her own helplessness.

Because of Lizzie she pulled herself together but she couldn't mislead Charlotte and Emily. Since the murders in the archives had happened and Harry, Caro and Draco had fled Charlotte's trust in Albus' abilities had been shaken as well. Alison was still very much furious if she thought that Severus had only returned to the headquarters of the Dark Lord on Albus' instigation. In Alison's opinion Albus was solely to blame for Severus' misery.

As far as Harry and his friends were concerned she tended to think that Charlotte's doubts were justified. She knew that Charlotte had tried several times to write to Harry, but the owls had brought back every letter. The children seemed to have disappeared from the earth. Alison let her gaze wander around and she caught her breath. Outside the wards which surrounded Hogwarts, a man, dressed in rags had sunken to his knees. Black long hair fell him into his face. The certainty that it was Severus hit her with sudden force. And Alison began to run.

Hermione sat in the back of the little boat and clutched startled at the boat sides as it was rocking fiercely for a moment. The reason for this was that Jamie and Lizzie quarrelled with Ron over the oars. Ron however got his way and threatened the little ones that if they wouldn't sit immediately still they would be brought back to the shore. That had the wished effect and relaxed Hermione could again lean back. She smiled to Ginny who sat opposite of her and was holding

five year old Meggie in her arms. But Ginny was lost in regarding her bracelet that glistened like snow in the sun.

Her friend had never told her where from she had it or the blinding shimmering ring she had got a few months ago. Hermione sighed sadly. Their relationship was nowhere as close as it had been in the past and Hermione didn't even know the reason for this. Since that one day nothing was the same anymore as it had been once. Had Harry, Caro and Draco never appeared in Hogwarts all this wouldn't have happened, she thought bitterly. Sirius had been so happy about finding his godson again. And Hermione knew that she had been jealous and on top of that having to discover that Carolina's father had murdered her Dad would have brought everyone to wish that they would again disappear. Her wish had been fulfilled but the consequences had been terrible.

Ginny's brother had been killed, the same as the other wizard and the happenings had hit Sirius very hard. He had changed and Charlotte also was unhappy. Only because of Harry, she thought angrily.

"Hermione, I'm hungry!"

Jamie's voice jolted her out of her thoughts and Hermione looked up. Since Lizzie also spoke up and announced that she was hungry too, Ron and Neville brought the boat back to the shore and they set off to return to the castle. Reaching the Great Hall of Hogwarts they saw the headmaster and several members of the Order standing close together and fiercely discussing something at the other end. Fred and George hurried over to them and halted shortly before them.

„We've just heard it. You won't believe it but Snape has returned!" Fred informed them agitated.

Hermione clasped Jamie's hand and didn't know why but for a moment fear seized her.

Although the Order had still tried to keep Severus' unexpected return a secret the whole castle soon knew about it. As Hermione went back to Sirius' and Charlotte's chambers with Jamie and Charlotte came shortly afterwards to bring Jamie to bed, Hermione heard what uproar Severus' return had caused.

“Half of the Order thinks that it's a trap and demands that Severus leaves the castle as soon as possible,” Charlotte said, shaking her head, after she had given Jamie a goodnight kiss and had closed his door.

“And if it is one?” Hermione asked who was sitting at the table and was sipping at her pumpkin juice.

„No, Severus isn't under the Imperius-Curse, Hermione. Nor the Polyjuice Potion has been used. Albus checked it. You don't need to worry, Hermione, nothing will happen.”

“How was he then able to escape?”

Charlotte frowned.

“I don't know, Hermione. Actually we know nothing yet. He isn't exactly in a good physical shape, what isn't surprising after all. Anyway Dumbledore has forbidden asking Severus any questions for the time being. In a few days we'll surely know more.”

After Charlotte had left again, Hermione stood up and went to one of the windows. Looking out she said herself that there wasn't any reason for this but why she had then this strange feeling if a dark premonition?

As Severus with the two children whose hands he was holding ran faster and faster to the soft shimmering wall of the wards, Sirius rose halfway up from his chair. Alison's eyes were also riveted on Severus and Lizzie and Jamie while the feeling of irrational fear and threat was increasing more and more. She froze in that moment where Severus passed the wards and suddenly several figures, dressed in black, appeared out from nowhere and surrounded Severus and the children.

“Jamie!” Sirius screamed and broke out in a run. He hadn't come very far however as Severus, the children and the other Death Eaters disappeared. Alison blinked. Everything had happened so fast that only now the wizards and witches, who had made themselves

comfortable on colourful blankets on the lawn, rose and reached for their wands.

Alison stood up as well, turned slowly around and began to walk. She arrived at her tree, where she, leant against the trunk, had cried for her unborn child so many years ago. She slid to the ground. Her inner being was frozen. Not a single tear wanted to roll down her cheeks. She had been so happy as Severus had miraculously returned a few days ago.

At nights she had laid awake and had watched Severus while still not believing the wonder which had brought Severus back to her; even if he had completely changed. His coldness, his changed character she had explained by him having had to suffer indescribable pains in the time he had been Voldemort's prisoner. She had suppressed his change, hadn't wanted to see it and had clutched to the hope that he would find back to his old self some day and that they would become again the happy family they had been before his disappearance. Even to Lizzie who had met the stranger rather fearful he had acted coldly. It had pained her but now her world anew collapsed, knowing that the man who had returned to her hadn't been her Severus.

Severus would have never kidnapped his daughter. Voldemort, she thought, it was always Voldemort who destroyed her life. What had he only done? What had he done to Severus? She should have had been more wary. She should have had...yes, what? Alison felt how dismay and bottomless fear seized her. She couldn't breathe anymore. 'Lizzie!' she screamed silently. What did Voldemort only have in mind with kidnapping two little children?

As soon as Charlotte had heard that Jamie and Lizzie had been abducted by Death Eaters, she tried with all her might not to lose her composure. An Order assembly would take place soon but Charlotte knew that the Order had no possibility to help Jamie and Lizzie. Sirius was standing with rigid face at the window. She wanted to go to him but her legs gave way.

She thought that she had said to Hermione a few days ago that she didn't need to worry. How right those had been which had demanded

to exile Severus immediately out of the castle. What should they only do now? Her child, her only child was in the hands of Voldemort and she couldn't do the slightest thing to save Jamie. Desperate she dug her nails so deeply into her palms that blood gushed out. Charlotte didn't even notice it, neither Emily's arm which was lying around her shoulders. She saw Jamie in front of her, the little baby who slept in her arms, the little toddler who had tried with clumsy steps to learn walking and she saw Jamie who sat smiling on his broom. A never known fear overcame her and choked her.

Suddenly the door flung open and Hermione and Ginny stormed in.

"Charlotte, there is perhaps a way how we can rescue Jamie and Lizzie," Hermione breathlessly exclaimed. Ginny stepped forwards and said,

„Last October Charlie – my brother – was caught by Death Eaters. They tortured him and they would have killed him if Harry hadn't appeared. Harry has saved his life. Harry would surely help us. He must know a way how we could get into the Headquarter!"

Sirius whirled around. His features were distorted.

„Harry is a Death Eater! He has killed Alfred and your brother. Did you forget this?"

Ginny shook her head.

„If he were one he wouldn't have saved Charlie's life. Apart from this he told me once they've escaped because they didn't want to learn how to kill. And regarding Mr. Farle and Bill, perhaps Caro did it or Draco. Or something entirely different happened of which we have not the slightest idea! Where from do you want to know that it was Harry?" Ginny retorted angrily.

"It couldn't have been Draco. He had detention with me at this time," Remus threw in.

"Then perhaps it was Caro," Ginny said and shrugged her shoulders.

Hermione looked thoughtfully up. She hadn't wanted to believe it as Ginny had come to her and had told her that she had never believed Harry to be guilty and that it had been him who had given her the bracelet and the ring and that Charlie owed his life to him. While listening to Ginny, she had also realized why Ginny had never told her this. She had never made a secret of her aversion against Harry and his friends and only when she had realized that Ginny loved Harry, she had understood how much she had hurt Ginny out of ignorance. She had also to admit that Ginny's arguments couldn't be denied entirely. Besides, she thought, if there was even the tiniest chance that they thus could rescue Jamie, she would not withhold her thought.

„Perhaps they didn't spy for the Dark Lord. Perhaps they just wanted to find out who had murdered Caro's father," she said softly.

Sirius and Remus stared at her while Ginny slapped her hand against her forehead.

"Of course, they must have searched for this!" Ginny exclaimed.

"For what?" Remus asked sharply.

„Caro's father was murdered by the Order of the Phoenix. They must have searched for some evidence;" Hermione explained who surprised realized that she had a guilty conscience. To hear from Ginny that Caro's father had been murdered by the Order had confused her.

„That doesn't change anything that they killed Alfred and Bill Weasley," Sirius said fiercely.

Charlotte sat abruptly up.

"Sirius, who killed Caro's father? If it was Alfred they would have had a reason."

The events which had taken place in Hogwarts last year, seemed to appear in a completely new light to everyone present.

"I don't know! But Bill? He hardly could have had killed Caro's father!"

“Be that as it may,” Charlotte said.

“It’s definitely worth a try.”

Sirius stared unbelievably at his wife.

“What?”

He wasn’t prepared for the angry blazing in her eyes. She stood up and halted directly in front of him.

“Do you think that the Order will attack Voldemort’s headquarter? That Albus will allow this? And even if, how much time would pass until we would have stormed the castle? If we should ever manage this at all! What I strongly doubt! Until then Jamie and Lizzie would be....“

Charlotte’s voice broke but then she continued,

„I won’t allow Voldemort hurting my child, Sirius! And if Harry can help us then it doesn’t matter to me a bit if he has murdered anyone or not! I doubted his guilt anyway the whole time! Besides, if he has helped Charlie why shouldn’t he help Jamie and Lizzie as well? He has liked the little ones! And he knows Voldemort’s castle. He has grown up there! We’ll have to try it, Sirius!“

Sirius blinked and pulled Charlotte, whose voice had sounded so desperate, close to himself.

Crying she clung to him for a moment.

A while later Sirius cast a glance at Ginny who was writing the letter to Harry while his thoughts wandered to Harry and he allowed them for the first time in a long time. The chaos of feelings that assailed him was hardly to bear. What had happened on that day had shocked him. Disappointed and betrayed he had banished Harry from his heart. Suddenly he started to think about Ginny’s words and a shimmer of hope began to fill him.

Could it be that Harry hadn’t been the one who had murdered the two? But was this still important now?

Solely Jamie counted in the moment and to save him he even would have formed an alliance with Voldemort in person. Sirius froze. What a nonsense. Voldemort was the reason for all misery, mourning and pain he had felt in the last fifteen years and now he was also responsible for the abduction of Jamie since he didn't believe that Severus would ever willingly kidnap his daughter, even if he had hated Severus ever since he could remember.

Looking at Alison, anger rushed over him. Why for god's sake hadn't she noticed anything? She must have noticed something after all! The fear for Jamie drove him nearly mad and the realization that he would indeed ally himself to his worst enemy to save his son's life, did upset him no less.

'You would betray all in which you believe,' a voice whispered in him and Sirius was appalled as he noticed that this wasn't bothering him particularly. He watched how Charlotte and Alison added still a few lines to Ginny's letter and how Ginny leaned out of the window.

"Rainbow!" she yelled and it took a moment until Sirius realized that Ginny shouted for Harry's phoenix. Harry, he thought, would he help them and get them entrance to the Dark Lord's castle? Sirius thoughts went only so far. He desperately forbid it himself to think further what they would find in the headquarters of the Dark Lord or what would happen there. That would go inevitably beyond his power. His bracelet lighted up and Sirius frowned. Whatever Albus would decide, one thing Sirius knew, he wouldn't abide by his decisions. Nothing, nothing in the world, would keep him from saving Jamie.

"Bring the letter as soon as possible to Jamie, will you? It's very important." he heard Ginny say to the black shimmering phoenix and for one moment it crossed Sirius' mind whether the magical bird had understand one word of Ginny's request at all.

Ginny looked in the black eyes of Rainbow and couldn't help herself as to believe that everything would turn out all right. She shuddered at the thought what she would have done if Rainbow hadn't come today to visit Fawkes. It was almost so as Rainbow had known that she would be needed. As Rainbow flew away, Ginny clutched her bracelet and gazed after the magical bird. The bracelets of the adults

trilled and Sirius tore his eyes away of the phoenix which was nearly out of sight now and stepped to Charlotte and Alison,

“Let’s go,” he said in a harsh voice.

Chapter 30

Caro screeched as Harry and Draco ran past her and threw themselves in the bright blue water of the ocean. Shaking her head annoyingly, she stepped slowly forwards and finally she managed it also to dive into the waves. The water was cold but as soon as she had got used to it, it was wonderful. She laid on her back and let herself float.

In the sky not even one single little cloud could be seen, she noticed. Without a warning she was pulled under water and angrily and gasping for air she dived up and rushed at Draco who grinning tried to run away but was stopped by Harry. Laughing they still stayed in the water for a while and then set off to swim back to the beach.

"Which is first at the blankets!" Draco shouted and begun to run across the warm sand.

Caro reached their shadowy place under the gaudy sunshade first. Snatching her towel, she smiled happily. How beautiful it was here. Terley really seemed to be a world of its own, she thought. A world without problems and worries, it crossed Caro's mind; at least nearly. Since Peter had disappeared last October, they couldn't sent him anymore to go shopping as they had done it most of the time before but had to leave the castle occasionally themselves; excursions which Caro never longed for.

The danger was too great to be discovered. So far they had had luck; Caro knew however that if they should meet again followers of the Dark Lord, they hardly could hope that Harry would be able to convince them again he acted by orders of his father as he had done it as they had saved Charlie Weasley. Thinking of Charlie she felt how a certain sadness rose in her. In the last months she had often thought of him, something she couldn't explain. He wanted to become an Auror after all, she thought contemptuously or perhaps he was it already. Hearing Harry's laughter, she nodded satisfied and set up.

She was so happy that Harry had finally overcome the ill-fated events, just as Peter's disappearance. Magic he also performed again, even if he did it without his wand which, as he had said, had lost. As Harry had realized that he could do more difficult and more advanced spells

he had been overjoyed. Obviously the long time where he had refrained from doing any magic at all had done him good. At least Harry assumed that the break was the reason for his sudden progress. Caro wasn't so sure about this but if it made Harry happy she would certainly not think about the exact reason. In the previous months they all had very much got ahead in the different branches of Magic. Though she had given it up to become ever an Animagus – she just hadn't a talent for this – she had been the first who had managed it to Apparate while Harry had still some minor problems with it.

Caro yawned sleepily and pushing Diamond who had curled herself up a bit aside, she stretched out. But now everything was all right again, she thought happily and just wanted to try taking a nap as a strange scream caused her to look up in the sky. Blinking she saw Rainbow, Harry's in the sun bright shining phoenix, who shoot towards them.

Harry stood up and felt a silent worry rising in him. Rainbow landed and as he took the letter off her, he recognized Ginny's handwriting. He read the written lines and then gazed up at the ocean which lay in front of him like a shimmering mirror, but he didn't see it.

Harry's hands, which felt like numb, were clutching the letter. For a little house-elf he had returned to Arreton Castle, despite his fear for the consequences of his escape and the reaction of his adoptive father, he hadn't been deterred from saving Nell. In that moment he had read Ginny's lines he had realized that he hadn't another choice as to return and to try everything in his power to help Jamie and Lizzie. The letter fell to the ground. The reality had caught up with him.

It was not possible anymore to run away from a decision. He knew that he had to choose one side and filled with conflicting feelings he finally forced himself to do so. It wasn't a matter of the Light Side or the Dark Side anymore; it wasn't a matter of Dumbledore's side or of his adoptive father. Two little children were at stake, Jamie who had been so amazed at his ability to speak with snakes and Lizzie who had brought Draco to tell her a story with her bright blue eyes. Harry shook his head. Why his adoptive father had kidnapped the children? But he wouldn't kill them, would he? So cruel his adoptive father

couldn't be. At the next moment doubts overcame him. Harry sighed. There was no point in thinking about what he would do.

Caro watched how the parchment fluttered gracefully on the sand and set up.

"Harry?" she said timidly.

Slowly Harry turned around and Caro froze as she saw his face. With odd sounding voice he said,

„Jamie and Lizzie were kidnapped."

"*What?*" Draco exclaimed who had sat up abruptly.

„They were abducted by Death Eaters. Ginny wrote and she, Charlotte and Alison ask us to help."

"But why? What does he have in mind with them?" Caro murmured despairingly, shocked that they had been so happy only one moment ago. She knew that Harry would return and in the same moment she realized that she also would do everything in her power to help the little ones, a realization which rather surprised her. Then she abruptly paused.

"You want to tell them where the secret passage way is, don't you? Do you know what this will mean? You would show the Light Side the way to victory!"

Draco's eyes widened.

„You can't do that, Harry!"

Harry stared despairingly at them.

"And what do you suggest shall we do? Shall we write Charlotte and Alison that we won't help them? And Jamie and Lizzie, don't you care what will happen to them?"

"But my parents...." Draco whispered. At the next moment he stood up.

“You’re right, Harry, we have to help them. Lizzie, I would never forgive myself if she would be tortured or worse as back then in the dungeons...” Draco said and broke up.

“Even if it means...”

„Damned, why had they have to do such a thing!“ he suddenly screamed.

“I don’t know,” Harry said gloomily.

Draco turned towards Harry, stepped to him and said after short hesitance,

“My mother would surely help us, Harry.”

“Your mother?” Harry asked confused.

„She would immediately tell my adoptive father that we are in the castle,“ he added and was astonished to see how Draco was shaking vehemently his head.

“No, she wouldn’t do that. I’ve written to her the last months after all, she knows where we are.”

Caro jumped up. She couldn’t believe what Draco just had said.

“You’ve written to her *where we are*? Are you out of your mind?”

“She didn’t tell anyone! If my mother had told it the Dark Lord he would have stood in front of our door long ago. Besides, it doesn’t play a role anymore, does it?”

„No, it doesn’t play a role anymore, not at all,“ Caro snapped and stormed up the cliffs.

Harry gazed after her.

„It’s difficult for her. It’s like betrayal on her father.”

“And for you?” Harry asked silently.

Draco returned his look sadly.

“For me as well. In the beginning Lizzie got rather on my nerves but over time I grew fond of her like a little sister. I love my parents, Harry and nevertheless it’s not right what they are doing. Lizzie and Jamie never did anything to anyone.”

While Draco was speaking, Harry suddenly realized that it also seemed like a betrayal to him. But why should it, Harry wondered angrily. Before he could however think further about this, Draco sighed,

“My mother could really help us. She surely knows where the children are.”

Although Harry was still not entirely convinced, he nodded,

“Come, we can’t lose any time,” he said and while they ran back to the castle, Rainbow flew back and Nell followed them with Diamond, wind caught the parchment, lifted it up into the air and as it was blown against a rock, it fell to the ground where it remained lying. A rat darted out of one of the rock’s clefts on the sand and studied the white sheet of parchment.

They met in Hogsmeade, near the Shrieking Shack. As Sirius saw Harry, the look of him hit him with indescribable force. He had changed since they had seen each other the last time. Harry had gotten tall. There wasn’t left any much and Harry would be tall just like him. Sirius stepped towards his godson. He had to know it finally, had to know it before they all would expose themselves to danger and would risk their life’s.

“Was it you? Did you murder Farle and Bill Weasley?”

Before Harry could answer, Caro began to speak.

“This Farle attacked us. We had to defend us. We didn’t want to kill him. It was an accident and Bill Weasley was murdered by Peter.”

Sirius’ eyebrows shot up.

„Peter?“ he repeated with a drawl.

“Yes, Peter Pettigrew. He stayed behind as we fled. He killed Bill Weasley and conjured up the Dark Mark.”

Sirius watched how Remus' eyes clouded over. Confused Sirius shook his head. The story seemed to be so much more complicated as he had thought still yesterday. Before he could however continue to think about this, Harry said,

„ Shouldn't we set off finally?“ and suddenly he wanted to forbid Harry to come along, just as he had forbidden it Hermione but he knew that they would not been able to get into the Dark Lord's castle without Harry and his friends. Sending a silent apology to James and Lily, he nodded grimly. To save Jamie's life had uttermost priority. Everything else was of secondary importance.

Meggie Lupin peered carefully from behind the table and gazed over to Hermione and Ginny who sat silently in their armchairs. Meggie knew that Hermione and Ginny wouldn't allow her to go out but Meggie wanted to her mother. She padded to the door, stretched a bit and opened the door. Quickly Meggie jumped along the corridor and then ran upstairs.

Neither Hermione nor Ginny noticed Meggie's disappearance. Hermione shook her head and rose abruptly out of her armchair. Tensely she paced around the room. She was worried to no end for Jamie, Sirius and Charlotte and Lizzie, she added in her thoughts. Her little brother was in greatest danger and she was condemned to this useless waiting. She had to help them; even if Sirius and Charlotte had forbidden it. Should the followers of Voldemort discover them then...And who knows whether they could really trust Harry. Hermione stopped in her tracks and looked despairingly to Ginny,

„I can't sit here inactively and do nothing! I've to help Jamie. And Sirius and Charlotte.“

“But that is much too dangerous. Apart from this, how do you want to find them?“ Neville's voice rang out from the door where he had appeared with Ron.

Hermione glared at him.

„So what? Where Voldemort's castle is located isn't a surprise after all. We can fly with our brooms. Everything else will work out somehow," Hermione said and prepared to go to any lengths, she marched past Neville and Ron who looked at her stunned and went out of the room. Ginny, who clutched onto her snowy bracelet, followed.

"That is such madness..." Ron murmured and ran behind his sister and Hermione. As everyone had fetched his broom, they hurried along the corridors.

"Hermione! How on earth shall we get through the wards?" Ginny asked and promptly crashed together with her friend who had stopped abruptly.

"Meggie and Ian! I've completely forgotten them!" she explained, spun around and ran back.

While two year old Ian was holding peacefully his afternoon nap, Meggie could be nowhere seen. Hermione took Ian out from his little bed and frowned.

"Ginny, we need this map, Fred and George's map!"

Before Ginny realized what Hermione meant, she stormed again away. Ron, who was holding Hermione's broom and Neville followed. Though they found Fred and George, they discovered to their disappointment that they hadn't the map any more.

"Yes, it was rather strange. One day Sirius came to us and said that the Order would need it. That was shortly after Harry Black and his friends appeared here," Fred said hatefully.

Hermione cursed and shortly afterwards they ran across the grounds of Hogwarts. Ian had they left with the stunned twins. Reassuring herself that nothing would happen to Meggie in the castle, Hermione's thoughts spun around in her head to find a way how they could go through the wards.

In the meantime Meggie had also come to a halt in front of the softly shimmering wall which isolated Hogwarts from the outside world. Pushing her tiny hands against the barrier, she tried to get through. It was however impossible.

“Meggie, what are you doing here?” a voice said and Meggie turned around.

Albus Dumbledore who just was going for a walk to clear his thoughts, bent down and saw that tears were running down Meggie’s little face.

“I want to Mummy.”

The old wizard wiped Meggie’s tears away and took her hand.

“Your Mummy is the castle. Come, let’s go to her.”

But Meggie didn’t want to come along.

“No, she isn’t. They’ve gone to fight but it is taking them so long already.”

Albus frowned. That couldn’t be. As he remembered however the strange behaviour of the Blacks, the Lupins and of Alison at the Order meeting which had taken place recently, he understood why he had had the impression that they had wanted to leave his office as soon as possible and hadn’t discussed further with him, nor had they tried to persuade him to attack the headquarter of Voldemort. Most worried he picked Meggie up and hurried with the little girl back to the castle as soon as possible.

“Draco! Finally I see you again. What have you only been up to then?”

Harry watched how Draco hugged his mother. Still not knowing whether it had been good to inform Narcissa about their arrival or not, his eyes lingered on Narcissa. It might quite be that Narcissa’s love to her son was greater than her loyalty to her master, in the contrary to Lucius Malfoy and Bella who would never act against the interests of the Dark Lord, Harry was sure of it. Since the dungeons were too

huge that it would have been possible to search them for the children, Narcissa would do them an inestimable service if she would reveal the whereabouts of the children to them.

This Harry had immediately realized so that he had relented to Draco despite his doubts. The question was only if she would really do it? Harry's gaze flickered to the door while trying to get his fear and nervousness under control. Draco still was whispering forcefully to his mother. Finally Narcissa turned away from Draco and shortly looked in their direction and then she went to the door. Draco smiled,

"Come," he said.

With each more step Harry felt how his fear increased. , Please', he prayed urgently, , let Jamie and Lizzie be still alive.' ,And let us not running into someone.' Harry clutched the stone of his necklace which he had always worn since the day they had escaped from Hogwarts and tried to encourage himself.

The dungeons became more and more gloomy and finally Narcissa stopped in front of one of the cell's door.

She waved her wand and the heavy door opened.

"The children are away," Narcissa said frowning, while Charlotte let out a suffocating noise.

"Perhaps..."

Agonizing screams echoed through the dungeons. Charlotte and Alison began to run. Sirius and Remus followed.

"No, come back!" Harry shouted before he also began to run. His heart was thumping painfully. In that moment he heard Charlotte screaming Jamie's name; he knew that his worst worries would come true. Slipping he reached one of the bigger under-ground halls. Charlotte, Sirius, Remus, Emily and Alison fought with Lucius, Bella, the Averetts and two other Death Eaters he didn't know. But the sound of approaching steps announced more Death Eaters.

Harry's gaze flickered to Lizzie and Jamie who were lying lifelessly on the ground. Without becoming aware of the danger Harry stormed forwards, right through the fighters. Falling to his knees he picked Lizzie up. Wonderful relief filled him as he realized that she was alive and that Jamie was breathing as well. His head jerked up and he froze. Charlotte who had managed to defeat her opponent, wanted to run to Jamie but the Dark Lord blocked her path. Harry who hadn't noticed the presence of his adoptive father at all so far, jumped up. Blinding green light shot towards Charlotte and Harry screamed,

"No!"

The black-haired woman fell to the ground and the eyes of the Dark Lord remained clung to Harry. Golden light surrounded him. Immediately Voldemort froze. Years disappeared. Suppressed memories rose in him. With two steps he had reached Harry, grasped him by the shoulders. Why he did this, he couldn't have said. Harry flinched back and Voldemort's eyes flew to the necklace which hung around Harry's neck. Shocked to the heart he stared at Harry. A voice full of hatred caused him to let go and spun around.

"You bastard!"

The blinding green light he blocked with ease and sent his Killing Curse behind. For one moment Harry stood there like paralyzed as he now saw the green light shooting towards Sirius. Though his godfather managed to avoid the deadly curse, he stumbled and fell literally in the arms of a black masked Death Eater. Harry wanted to help Sirius but he hadn't come far as pain seemed to explode in him. Never known pain assailed him and crashed down on him.

Minerva felt how fear seized her as the tremendous, threatening and gloomy looking castle appeared in front of them and the forest cleared. They hadn't wasted any time after Albus had found out that Sirius. Charlotte, Remus, Emily and Alison had gone to the headquarters of the Dark Lord. While controlling his anger with difficulty, Albus had immediately informed the whole Order of the situation and had straightway set off with all volunteers, at least after the majority had decided to help their colleagues. Otherwise Albus

would probably still have not decided to attack the fortress of the Dark Lord, Minerva thought shaking her head. In her opinion they should have immediately made the decision and not to wait until the desperate parents tried it single-handedly.

While Albus examined the wards, Minerva's heart filled with boundless worry. The peaceful morning seemed to her already so far away. In front of her eyes she saw Severus running across the lawn with Jamie and Lizzie, saw Sirius jumping up and Alison walking away, strangely, in the opposite direction. It had taken one moment until they had realized what had happened. Of course Albus had blamed himself greatly but what should they have done as they had found Severus unconsciousness in front of the gates of Hogwarts a few days ago.

"It's hopeless," Albus said and dropped his hands.

Minerva stared at him while it crossed her mind that there had to be a way, after all Sirius, Charlotte, the Lupins and Alison had got into the castle somehow.

„I'll show you the way.“

The members of the Order whirled around and Minerva believed to see a ghost in front of her. Though it had been nearly thirteen years ago since she had seen him the last time, she recognized Peter Pettigrew immediately.

Suddenly the pain decreased and Harry rolled aside while gasping for air. His eyes were watering and his head and body hurt.

"Harry," a voice said and he felt himself picked up. Harry blinked and as he finally could see clearer again, he recognized that he was in the embrace of his adoptive father. A cold hand laid on his forehead and magic surrounded him and slowly the after-effects of the Cruciatus-Curse disappeared. How strange, Harry thought dazed, this is the first time he hugs me. As he however remembered all of a sudden what had happened and why they had come here, he flinched back. In this moment voices rang out. His adoptive father released him and Harry clambered to his feet.

Remus, Sirius, Emily and Alison were hold prisoner. Harry's attention was directed quickly to something else however. Scarlet cloaks pushed their way into the stony hall. Harry's eyes roamed and fell onto Caro and Draco who crunched next to Lizzie and Jamie. Harry slipped through the fighters and hardly had he safely reached the other side, Caro crying flung her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Harry, are you all right? We were so afraid for you."

"Yes. Caro, Draco, listen. We have to get Lizzie and Jamie out of here. Quick," he said hurriedly and freed himself of Caro's embrace. While Draco picked up Lizzie, Harry took Jamie in his arms and pointed with his head towards the opposite side.

"There, the way leads up to the great hall."

They held themselves closely to the wall and Harry saw to it that no curse hit him a second time in the fighting.

As they had reached the stairs, Harry still cast a gaze back and he froze abruptly. Red hair shortly flared up, but he was sure.

"Get Jamie out of danger," he whispered and handed the little one to Caro.

Without waiting for her reaction, he ran back. How on earth did Ginny come here? But he didn't come very far. A wizard with a scarlet cloak blocked his path and Harry had no choice but to fight. Very quickly he forget all consideration, he only wanted to Ginny and get her into safety. Dark Magic can be really useful after all, as his opponent dropped to the ground. It was narrow in the underground vault and the danger was great that you were hit by curses which weren't actually meant for you.

Fighting Harry forced his way through the crowd. His senses were tensed to the extreme. He heard a buzzing noise and instinctively he whirled around, blocked the curse and sent the next best curse which occurred to him. Only then he saw whom he faced. While his brilliant silver light shoot towards his adoptive father, who lowered his wand, his gaze met with his adoptive father's for a fraction of a second. Then he was hurled backwards. Silvery fire seemed to consume him.

As the light faded away, the Dark Lord lay motionless on the ground. Harry felt how the fighters froze, felt how someone hurried past him with long strides.

Minerva dropped her wand while she held her breath as Albus bent over Voldemort.

“Is he dead?” a gruff voice asked and she saw how Alastor Moody limped towards Albus.

“No. Only unconsciousness,” Albus replied, sighing tiredly.

At this moment those Death Eaters who still were able to fight seemed to wake up from their paralysis. Minerva however stepped to Harry who stood rigidly in the middle and laid one arm around his shoulders. Minerva hugged him, something what Harry let happened meekly. How could they have been so blind? Minerva asked herself.

She still was shocked about everything Peter had told them earlier. Full of mistrust they had not wanted to believe Peter that he wanted to lead them inside the castle but since the time was running away more and more and they didn't find a possibility to get into the headquarters they had finally agreed, despite the fact that they all hadn't forgotten that it had been him who had betrayed Lily and James. On their way Pettigrew had told them what had happened then in the archives of the Order and Minerva had been shocked.

“Harry. Come, let's go,” she said and wanted to pull him along with her. It was still dangerous, not all followers of the Dark Lord had been defeated yet.

Harry however shook off her arm and took a leap forwards. Quick as lightning he was next to Alastor and knocked his hand aside. The blinding green light was flung against the wand.

„No,“ he said softly.

„I won't allow that you kill him.“

Chapter 31

Emily covered little Jamie up and felt again how the desire to cry overcame her. Giving Jamie a kiss, she slowly turned around and left the room. She went to Sirius who was standing next to the window and was looking out.

“Sirius, Jamie needs you now. You have to...”

“No, I can’t. I just can’t Emily.”

He looked at her with such an expression in his eyes that she knew that she wouldn’t be able to bring herself to try it once more to persuade him.

“I’ll stay with Jamie,” she said softly and returned to her nephew who still was trembling like a leaf and still hadn’t really realized that he would never again see his mother. Holding Jamie in her arms, she began to hum while her heart was breaking. Charlotte had been more to her than a sister. She had been her other half. Her whole life Charlotte had been there for her, had protected her, had helped her, and had been her confidant. After the death of their parents, she had comforted her and she had clung to her older sister. Emily couldn’t believe that her sister should not been there anymore. How should they only live on? Staring into the darkness, she realized that it meant nothing to her that Voldemort had been brought to Askaban. Somehow she couldn’t bring herself to feel that it meant something. The war was over but Charlotte was dead.

Emily thought back to the events which had led to this catastrophe. Where had been the beginning?

If Dumbledore had listened to Severus and Alison and would have never sent him back to Voldemort, would then everything have happened differently? If Harry and his friends would have never appeared in Hogwarts, would it then have happened? Emily knew that Charlotte hadn’t really believed in Harry’s fault at the murders of Farle and Bill Weasley and she knew that Charlotte would have never hold Harry responsible for what had happened but at this moment she couldn’t help herself as to blame Harry in her sorrow just as Dumbledore, Voldemort and the Order and even Jamie and Lizzie,

only to feel ashamed immediately afterwards. How could she seriously think that it was Jamie's fault?

As Jamie had finally fallen asleep, Emily rose and went over to Hermione's room. Emily remembered how frightened they had been as the children had appeared in the stony hall. Hermione was lying in bed. Her eyes were opened and seemed to stare at the opposite wall. Emily laid cautiously a hand on Hermione's shoulder.

"Hermione?"

Hermione looked at her with shadowy eyes.

"Why? Emily, why..." Hermione's voice broke and Emily pulled the girl into her arms.

Albus Dumbledore had climbed up one of the towers and shortly afterwards he leaned against the battlements. While looking in the star-strewn sky, he softly sighed. It was hard to believe that the war was indeed really over now. Since Voldemort was now in Askaban and his headquarters had been destroyed, those followers which hadn't been caught yet would surely not continue the war. At least he was hoping this, unless there would be a leader who could replace Riddle. It had been luck for them that only a part of the Dementors had joined the Dark Lord so that Askaban had never fallen into Tom Riddle's hands during all those years. Albus's thoughts wandered to Harry. He had wanted to take the boy and his friends along to Hogwarts but Harry had refused and had returned to Terley with his friends.

He didn't like it at all that he hadn't managed to stop Harry but at least the boy had told him where he could get hold of them. Terley, Albus thought, this answer had surprised him just as the sudden appearance of Peter Pettigrew and his role he had played in the events which had happened in the archives.

As he had heard after the fight that Pettigrew had intercepted one curse which had been meant for Remus and thus had saved Remus' life and so had lost his own life, he hadn't wanted to believe it. And to think that so many years ago he had betrayed Lily and James, a

persistent little voice whispered in him. But Albus shuddered at the thought of what would have happen if Pettigrew hadn't showed them the way into the castle.

He hadn't any doubt that they wouldn't have been able to save the children and they would have not only lost Charlotte but Sirius, the Lupins and Alison as well. Sadly Albus blinked. He had liked Charlotte very much. Turning around, he went to the stairs. Going slowly downstairs, his thoughts wandered to Severus. They had found him unconsciousness in one of the dungeons of Arreton Castle and they had taken him with them. Currently he was lying in the hospital wing. Still no one knew what had happened to him or what on earth had brought him to kidnap his daughter and Jamie.

But whatever had happened, Albus thought, life had to go on, as hard as it was. Perhaps one day answers to his questions would be found. Reaching the door to his office, he decided to speak with Harry as soon as possible. Harry had to return to Hogwarts, now that they knew who had been responsible for the murders in the archives.

After Remus had brought his children to bed, he began to search for his wife and Sirius. Emily he found with Hermione, gently he closed the door and sighing he looked around but Sirius was nowhere to see.

He was worried about his friend and he thought where he could have gone to. Returning to Meggie and Ian, he frowned. Where are you Sirius? He felt however a certain relief that he hadn't to face Sirius at this moment.

He could imagine only too well what Sirius was feeling now. His sorrow was nothing in comparison to Sirius' grief.

"Dad. Where's Mummy?"

Remus jumped slightly as he saw his five year old daughter standing in front of him who blinked at him sleepily. Picking her up, he ran a hand over her dishevelled curls.

"You should be sleeping long ago, Meggie," he said and Meggie snuggled up to him.

Once more Remus' thoughts revolved around the fight. At least they had been able to save the children, he thought and tightly hugged his daughter. He however should not been sitting here now, it flashed through his mind.

As Jamie and Lizzie had been kidnapped today it hadn't been a question to him whether he would come along to the Dark Lord's castle. Despite his limited ability to fight and although he had known that should it come to a fight he would hardly have a chance to survive due to his crippled leg, he had refused to stay in Hogwarts.

He had already believed everything lost as the Death Eaters had held onto them. The unexpected arrival of the Order had resulted in him being able to free himself. Shortly afterwards he had found himself opposite of Peter. Surprised they had looked at each other for one moment. From somewhere a curse had shoot towards them and for a fraction of a second Peter had regarded him with a strange, desperate expression in his eyes and then he had thrown himself in front of him and thus had saved his life. Remus still couldn't believe it. Thirteen years ago he had vowed to kill Peter and to get revenge for the betrayal and now Peter of all people had saved his life.

Remus shook his head. For so many years he had hated his former friends and now he didn't know anymore what he should feel towards Peter. Remus looked down on his sleeping daughter and boundless gratitude overcame him, even if he certainly would never understand why Peter had done this.

Looking out of the window on the dark lake, Ginny stood motionless in her room. Trying to sleep was pointless, she was much to churned up inside. As they had been standing clueless in front of the wards, Ginny had already thought that they wouldn't manage it to leave the castle. Unexpectedly they had run into a member of the Order and although she was still feeling bad about it they hadn't had another choice but to curse him with a Stunner and to steal his bracelet just as Harry, Caro and Draco had to have done it then. The forest which surrounded the headquarters of the Dark Lord they had found without any difficulties. There they had waited again since they hadn't found a way how to get inside the castle.

Their surprise had been great as suddenly nearly the whole Order had appeared, so that they had followed the adults to the stony hall in the end. She had seen Harry only for a moment then Charlie had grasped her arm and dragged her and Ron out, his friend had taken care of Hermione and Neville. Only later they had heard what had happened. If she should go to Hermione? To find out that Voldemort had murdered Charlotte must have hit Hermione hard, Ginny thought. She knew after all how much Hermione had been attached to Charlotte. Remembering how it had been as she had mourned over Bill, she left her room and padded silently through the corridors. Reaching the chambers of the Blacks, she still hesitated, then she however opened the door which strangely wasn't locked. The room lay in complete darkness.

Timidly she opened the door to Hermione's room and stopped abruptly. Emily was with Hermione, they clung to each other and Ginny stepped back. After she was in her bed short time later, she pulled her blanket tightly around her and touched Harry's bracelet. She wondered how he was feeling now. She didn't know what exactly had happen but that Harry had defeated Voldemort seemed strange to her. Though she hardly knew something about him, neither from his childhood, nor his feelings, she loved him and missed him greatly. It was crazy but she couldn't change it. Would he now return to Hogwarts?

Caro stood on the terrace and looked at Harry and Dumbledore who ere walking down to the beach. Stepping to one of the deckchairs, slowly sit and riveted her gaze on the ocean. Still she couldn't believe the events which had taken place in Arreton Castle a few days ago. If she remembered this, she still had the feeling that she had betrayed her father but Caro knew that she would act exactly in the same way, should she had to make this decision again. After they had brought the little ones back to Hogwarts and had returned to Arreton, everything had been settled already.

They had heard only from Dumbledore what had happened as they had finally spotted Harry among the scarlet cloaks. Neither Draco's parents, nor her mother they had seen anymore. Caro shook her head. She shuddered at the thought that her mother and Draco's

parents were in Askaban. Draco was desperate. However they had imagined the outcome would be of their attempt to help – had she done it at all, she wondered or had all her thoughts been riveted on Jamie and Lizzie; Caro didn't know it anymore – surely they would have never imagined that it would end like this. T

he Dark Side completely destroyed, at least in Great Britain and the Dark Lord in Askaban. Why. She asked herself, hadn't he defended himself. As they had returned to Terley after the fight, Harry had started at her with strange lifeless look and had murmured this question to him over and over again. Caro didn't understand it either. He could have blocked Harry's curse without any difficulty. Did Harry mean more to him as she had always believed?

Caro leaned back in her deckchair. She was worried. Harry was in a worse condition he had been after the events in the archives of the Order and Draco who feared for his parents, wanted to free them with their help. Harry's behaviour, who had reacted rather apathetically to Draco's desperate attempts to think up a plan, had led to a fierce quarrel between the two yesterday or more precisely said Draco had shouted and Harry had remained silent with rigid face. How should it only go on now? Caro thought sadly and helplessly. Harry didn't speak practically at all anymore.

Caro sat up and gazed into distance. She could still recognize Dumbledore and Harry as little dots. Hopefully it didn't turn out to be a mistake that she had told Harry that Dumbledore had stood outside of the wards and had insisted upon speaking with Harry. As she hadn't been able to dissuade him from his intention, she had finally gone to fetch Harry. What did Dumbledore want from Harry?

„Harry, you have done what had to be done. You have ended the war. You can really be proud of yourself. Especially...”

Dumbledore continued to speak but Harry didn't listen to him anymore. He regretted it that he had let the old wizard, who had stood outside the wards of Terley in, after Caro had told him of it.

„Proud?’ he wondered. Of what? Should he be proud that Charlotte was dead; that Severus was not able to communicate to anyone and

had obviously lost his mind, that Jamie and Lizzie suffered from nightmares and would never forget the happenings; that Alison and Sirius were desperate and overwhelmed by sorrow; that he had betrayed his adoptive father and had brought him to Askaban where he was waiting for his execution; that Draco wasn't talking to him anymore; that Draco's parents and Bella as well were waiting for their sentences?

"....your education. If the new school year will begin...."

Harry thought of Hogwarts and alone the imagination having to attend the lessons as nothing would have happened caused great aversion rising in him. Apart from this, would he be able to bear seeing his godfather again, Alison, Jamie and Lizzie, Emily and Remus? He would always be remained of what had happened. Shuddering he shook his head. No, he certainly would not return to Hogwarts. Since he hadn't any desire however to get involved in an argument with Dumbledore he assured the old wizard that he would come to Hogwarts at start of school.

As Dumbledore had finally left him alone, Harry went down to the beach, sat on the warm sand and stared at the ocean which stretched itself so endlessly far and listened to the noise of the waves. It was strange but everything seemed not really to touch him, it was almost so as he would see everything through a fog.

Ginny's letter he hadn't answered and even as Draco had screamed at him that they had to do something, he hadn't really cared. He didn't want to think of it anymore, he did want to forget it, he wanted to forget everything.

Chapter 32

March 1995

Harry stared up to the fortress which rose into the sky in front of him. He felt how an icy shiver seized him. In one of the many cells of Askaban Voldemort was being held prisoner. Over a half year had passed now since the fateful day had changed everything. The memory rose in him and he allowed it, made no attempt trying to suppress it. It was finally time to meet his past.

It had been at the beach as Caro had come to him and had handed him the newspaper. She hadn't said a word, had only looked at him but the expression in her grey eyes had been enough to cause him to emerge from the depths of his indifference. He had stared at the newspaper and the big headline which had hit him in the eye, had shaken him up. As he had read the executions of the Dark Lord and his closest confidants should take place in a few days, he had gazed at the ocean and had asked himself how it should go in.

The last months he had swayed between helpless fury, hate and self-pity and finally he had realized that it couldn't do on like this and that it wasn't a solution to run away from his past and everything what had happened in the last years. To realize this fact had been so much easier however as to put his decision to face his past into action. But he finally had to find an answer to his question which continuously haunted him since then. Why had his adoptive father not blocked his curse? He had just stood there and had not even undertaken the smallest attempt to ward his curse off.

Why? Involuntarily Harry pulled his cloak tighter around himself. He was still not quite sure which feelings he had for his adoptive father. Since he had abducted the children and had murdered Charlotte any affection for him had been extinguished. But why Harry asked himself had he then prevented Alastor Moody from killing his adoptive father? Harry sighed. It wouldn't bring anything to stand here outside as long as possible.

Taking a deep breath, he transformed. The beautiful, gold shimmering phoenix spread out his wings and flew skywards. After some searching he found the right cell, flew through the tiny window

and landed on the ground. Hardly Harry had changed back, as he staggered and stumbled against the cold wall. He heard his mother screaming his name, saw how Charlotte was hit by the blinding green light. Harry's magic flared up and the effects of the Dementors which guarded the prison, lessened. Trembling gasping for air, Harry guarded the cell against the power of the Dementors. His eyes fell on the figure who lay curled up on the wooden bed and he was shocked. Did he come too late? He stepped forwards and stopped suddenly as the eyes of the prisoner slowly opened and riveted on him.

"Harry," he croaked with hoarse voice.

"You came."

A smile passed over his emaciated face.

"At each breath I've wished you would come."

Harry stared at his adoptive father and conflicting feelings raged in him. It hit him to the core to see the once so powerful and frightening wizard so frail.

"Why?" he asked more forcefully as he had intended

It was silent for a very long time and Harry already thought his adoptive father hadn't heard him as his voice rang out.

„ You are my grandson," the former Dark Lord said suddenly.

Harry jerked his head up.

"Your necklace. I had the other half," he added.

Still unbelievably staring, only a hoarse,

"*What?*" came over Harry's lips.

The red eyes which watched him took on a nearly loving expression.

"At the moment I saw that you were wearing the necklace I knew it," he said.

A wistful smile appeared on his face.

“It was October as I met her. By the shores of the lake we see each other for the first time. She was a year younger than me and in Gryffindor while I was in Slytherin. That was surely the reason why we hadn’t seen each other before. She had beautiful red-golden hair and eyes in the colour of amber; eyes which sparkled all the time.

For the first time in my life I was happy. If I was together with her I forget my hate, my ambition to become the most powerful wizard. Miraculously she returned my love. One day we created the necklaces – originally there were two identical stones – provided them with protection charms and sealed our love in them.”

Voldemort broke up.

“What...what happened then?” Harry asked, not sure, if he really wanted to know it.

“The summer holiday tore us apart. I wrote her letters but she did not answer even one of them. She also didn’t come back to school. I was beside myself; the teachers told me that she would go to another school. All the years I thought she had betrayed me. I hated her, the only person who had ever meant something to me.

But I had time, much time, in the last months to remember and to realize that she would have never done such a thing. She must have expected my child then. I don’t know why she never told me and she never wrote back to me. But at this Halloween I unknowingly killed my daughter and almost you as well.”

Cough let him become silent. After a while he continued,

“Cathy was also surrounded by this golden light, at least if she was angry, desperate or beside herself of fear. Her golden light was however far stronger than yours. Some said she was descended from elves – this would be at least an explanation – but if this fit with the truth...”

Harry leaned against the cold wall. He did not doubt a word he just had heard. As soon as he had found out the name of the girl he knew

that it was the truth. Cathy, he thought, now he knew why this girl had reminded him so much of his mother. If he had known that the Dark Lord was his grandfather, would he then have acted otherwise? Would he then have escaped as well? Slowly he slid down and remained sitting on the ground, he draw his knees to himself. His thoughts revolved around what he just had heard. He buried his head in his arms. He didn't know why but the unexpected revelation had shocked him. In his early childhood he had believed that the Dark Lord was his father, and then he had found out that he had killed his real parents and now he discovered that he was his grandfather.

"So that's why you didn't block my curse..." he said softly.

But did it play a role who he was? His identity didn't change his past; he couldn't change it as much he would have loved it. Did it change the present time and would it influence his future? Why should it do this? Harry thought, I am still the same person after all. I am Harry Potter and nothing will change this. Harry's thoughts wandered back to the past and while he remembered his desperate struggling to reach a decision on which side he stood, he realized that he always had only seen the sides of his parents and Dumbledore and of his grandfather but what if both sides were wrong?

Might his grandfather had started this war, might the reasons for Dumbledore and the Order had been once 'good' why they fought and might they had only defended themselves in the beginning, in the end both sides had murdered and tortured. Whatever had happened, he would have always fought against one side. If the Halloween Night had never happened fourteen years ago, he would have learned to hate the Dark Side and some day he had be at war with Voldemort and his followers. Perhaps he would even have faced Caro and Draco one day. Harry shuddered as he imagined this. In the future only his convictions would be the deciding factor, he would comply with what he would think was right and never would he allow him being told again what he should do or what he should think.

As Harry lifted his head, he felt a strange confidence. Harry thought back to the Speaking Hat. Yes, it had been right, he had finally decided on one side, for his own. Accepting his past, his feeling of guilt seemed to become lighter as well.

“So you’ve kidnapped the children to bring me to come back to Areeton Castle?” he asked finally.

“I’ve suspected that you have fled to Hogwarts. There weren’t many possibilities after all. Severus has confirmed my suspicion then and I began to think what I could do. To attack Hogwarts was impossible and moreover would have been completely useless, so only Severus was left. As I found out that he had been Dumbledore’s spy for so many years, I actually wanted to kill him but then I realized that he was the key with which I could bring you back.

As I realized your aversion against killing and torturing I began to think how I could bring you to obeying me despite of it. In one of my old books I found a potion which combined with a curse would be far stronger than the Imperius-Curse and after some time the cursed person would lose his memory and would be subject to the will of his master. I let him brew the potion in my presence and the completion dragged of course on for a longer period of time.

It took a while as well until the effects set in and Severus lost his memory. As the time had finally come where Severus obeyed me unquestioningly and not even Dumbledore would have been able to find a Dark charm, I could put my plan into action. Sure, I didn’t know if you would really come but the probability was high. I had nothing to lose after all. My worry was that Dmbledore, this fool, would find a way to hold you back or would even lock you inside the castle so that you wouldn’t come.”

Harry inclined his head.

“Would you also have done it if you had known that I wasn’t in Hogwarts anymore?”

“Yes, Harry I think even then I wouldn’t have given up my plan.”

”You really would have done this to me, wouldn’t you?“ Harry asked suddenly.

His grandfather was silent for a long time but finally he answered,

“Yes, I would have and I would have lost you then. It was good that you escaped.”

Harry shuddered as he thought of Severus and decided that he would read that book of which his grandfather had spoken as soon as possible. Perhaps he would find a way in there how to help Severus Snape. A dry cough jolted Harry out of his thought and he knew that he couldn't let his grandfather here; despite all what the Dark Lord had done and had wanted to do to him. Harry knew that he would never forgive himself if his grandfather was executed. Even if it was a risk, Harry thought, not knowing if he would be capable of preventing his grandfather from seizing power a second time, should he try it contrary to all expectation. But one question he still wanted to have answered.

“Why did you start the war?” he asked.

„I grew up in an orphanage, Harry. I won't tell you what I had to endure there. It was the hell; that must be enough for you. As I came to Hogwarts it was a entire different world to me. I was fascinated of magic and vowed to me that I would become the most powerful wizard one day. Never again I wanted to be so helpless, to have the feeling of being on someone's mercy and never again I wanted to be humiliated and I wanted to take revenge. The heads of the orphanage were among the first I later killed. I've never learned to handle other people, Harry and so I stayed alone in Hogwarts until I met Cathy. I loved her. She was the first person who ever meant something to me. As she disappeared and I believed that she had betray me, there I only had my hate, my loneliness and my revenge left. I began to imagine how it would be to rule the world and I looked for followers which would obey me and so one thing led to another.”

Harry went to him, kneeled don in the ground and reached fort he cold hand. The red eyes stared at him intensively and to Harry's greatest surprise he saw tears in them.

“Harry, forgive me,” he whispered.

Harry felt how pity rose in him. But against the pictures which forced themselves on him involuntarily he was powerless. He remembered

Charlotte, his parents who he had never got to know, Lizzie and Jamie, Nell and he swallowed.

"I'll try," he said.

The hand of his grandfather squeezed his.

"Thank you."

The red eyes slid to his necklace and a thoughtful expression entered the red eyes.

"You must have had it with you somehow. It must have protected you as I tried then to kill you. That would be indeed an explanation why you survived the Killing Curse," he croaked, stretched out one hand and touched the black, slightly shimmering, stone which hung around Harry's neck.

"The stones shone once in a bright warm golden colour. He must have changed its colour as the Killing Curse hit you," he said and was seized by another coughing fit.

"That may be so. Come, I'll bring you away from here," Harry said and helped his grandfather to sit up. With difficulty he heaved him up. While flinging one arm around his grandfather who hardly could stand on his feet, Harry brought the cell's door to disappear with the other hand. Hardly had they left the cell, a Dementor floated towards them. Harry resorted to Dark Magic and destroyed him. He was however aware of the fact that he didn't have much time. They had to leave the prison as soon as possible but before he had still to take care of something.

The black-haired girl knocked at the door and shouted,

"Harry, dinner is ready."

Since Caro didn't receive any answer, she pressed down the door handle. The door opened and Caro saw that the room was empty. Strange, where Harry could be? Shaking her head, she headed back to the kitchen. Arriving there, she said,

“Harry isn’t in his room.”

Draco looked up and shrugged his shoulders.

“So what?”

While turning again to his fried potatoes, Caro sat down and reached slowly for her glass. Taking a sip of her pumpkin juice she sighed. Since the day in Arreton Castle, she wondered what she could do to ease up the situation but so far she hadn’t found any solution. Harry seemed to be incapable of finding out of his suppressed, apathetically depression and didn’t care in the slightest that Draco was nearly losing his mind because of his fear for his parents.

She was worried as well for her mother and for Draco’s mother who had so often taken care of her as she had been little. Although she had never had a particularly warm relationship with her mother, she missed her and under no circumstances did she want her to be executed. She is still my mother, after all, Caro thought.

Looking at Harry’s empty chair, she asked whether his disappearance had something to do with the fact that she had shown him today’s newspaper in which had been reported with large headline that the executions of the Dark Lord and his highest-ranking followers would take place very soon. Furious that it didn’t seem to bother Harry, she had marched to the beach and hurled the newspaper at him. Suddenly Draco put down his fork and said,

“We’ve to go to Askaban.”

Caro stared at him.

„How? Do you want perhaps to climb up the walls as a squirrel?”

Draco cast a venomous glance at Caro, stood up abruptly so that the chair scraped over the floor and stormed out. Helpless fury boiled in his veins. If he would have only known a way how to get inside the fortress of Askaban, he would have freed his parents long ago. And Harry, who was able to change into a phoenix and thus would be able to pass the wards which surrounded Askaban, refused to help him for months, only stared at him with those emerald eyes.

It was enough, the last half year he had tried over and over again to bring Harry to help him freeing his parents, had said that Harry would simultaneously save his adoptive father but he could have spoken with a wall just as well, he thought bitterly. Draco came to a halt. He hadn't wanted to believe it, had thought that Harry would help him and had never given up hope but now he admitted that Harry purely and simply left him in the lurch. He crossed the hall and went to one of the large arched-shaped windows. Mostly disappointed he made a decision: he would leave Terley and would return to the estate of his parents. He should have done this long ago and shouldn't have waited that Harry would help him. Draco just wanted to turn as a movement caught his attention. He held his breath as he recognized the people who walked up the broad path which led to the castle.

Harry felt how the wind dropped as he passed the magically wards from Hogwarts, landed on the ground and changed back. Looking up to the tremendous castle, he remained staying undecidedly for a moment. The time where he had lived here seemed so far away. His eyes wandered up to the battlements and lingered there. Remembering how he had stood there with Ginny. If she had forgotten him or did she still thought of him? She had written but he had never been able to bring himself to answer her. Finally they had decreased more and more. Harry couldn't explain it himself why he had behaved in such a way but it was too late for regretting it.

His hand slid into one of his pocket where he found the letter he had received in the morning from Dumbledore with the urgent request to come immediately to Hogwarts.

Sighing he ran a hand over his forehead. Still he was plagued by a fierce headache. As he had freed his grandfather, Draco's parents and Bella yesterday he hadn't thought of Askaban being surrounded by a powerful ward, in front of which they had been standing soon afterwards and which had deterred Draco from freeing his parents so far.

,You'll manage it. Do it just the same way you did as you broke the curses on your windows then. But use only a little part of your magic.

And use this spell.', his grandfather had said, had leaned forwards him and had whispered a word to him.

Harry had managed to annul a part of the ward but he could have done without that headache. At least he hadn't fainted, he thought.

Harry glanced up to the castle's portal. Of the prospect to having to run through the whole castle he wasn't so fond. First of all he wanted to speak with Dumbledore. Changing back into his phoenix he flew up to Albus' office and knocked with his beak against the window. Shortly later it was opened and bald Harry had taken on his human form again and faced Albus Dumbledore. The old wizard stepped to his desk and set down.

„Nice that you've come," he said and indicated him to take a seat as well.

Albus regarded him and while speaking he didn't let him, out of his sight.

"Voldemort, the Malfoys and Bellatrix Lestrange aren't anymore in Askaban. You don't have something to do with this by chance?"

Although his voice was rather quite, Harry heard a dangerous undertone. Indifferently resisting Albus' searching look, he answered,

"He is my grandfather." Albus blinked.

"Tom Riddle is my grandfather," Harry added and told Dumbledore everything he had found out the previous day.

As Harry had finished, Albus was left speechless. A condition he hadn't very often experienced so far in his life. He just couldn't believe it. Lily should have been Riddle's daughter? The pretty kindest woman he had loved like a daughter? He already wanted to reject this possibility as impossible as a memory rose in him. Harry had spoken of a Cathy. Catherine of Dunbarry. She had been his student. A quite, inconspicuously girl, so completely different as Lily with her bright sparkling eyes who had stood everywhere in the centre of attention, not because she had been out for it by all means but just because she had basically charmed everyone with her cheerful

exuberant nature, but Lily had had Catherine's red-golden curls and suddenly he sat straight up as he remembered a long ago occurrence. Late at night he had returned to Hogwarts and had gone past the library.

He had heard noises and as he had entered the library whose door had been ajar, he had heard laughing which had come from the Forbidden Section. His presence hadn't been unnoticed however, the dim light had gone out suddenly and whoever had been there had ran away and before Albus had been able to reach the second exit, the two nightly loafers had been nowhere to be seen. It had been Lily's laugh and strangely.

Albus thought, he had always associated it with her but to this time Lily hadn't even been born. He remembered as well the nurse who had told him then from mysterious faints and a few weeks later with shocked expression about a girl that expected a child. Her father had taken her from school as Dippet who had been headmaster at those times, had informed him of this. Tom Riddle had asked after the girl and now Albus realized that he had changed in the following weeks. Albus shook his head. Why hadn't he paid more attention to those events then?

"If that was all?"

Harry's voice jolted him out of his memories. Albus shook his head and collected his thoughts.

"Harry, Voldemort must be returned to Askaban..."

Harry stood up however and looked at him with cold eyes.

"No, I won't bring him back and you will not tell the Ministry that he is in Terley, nor that I freed him out of prison or that he is my grandfather. He has paid for his deeds. You don't need to worry that he will ever try to seize power again. I'll take care of it."

"Why should I keep my knowledge a secret from the Ministry?"

“Because you want that I return to Hogwarts, because you want to prevent by all means that I’ll become a dark wizard and because you want to settle your debt which you feel towards me and my parents.”

Albus flinched slightly.

“What are you getting at?”

“That you blame yourself that my parents were murdered. You knew that there was a spy, don’t you? Peter has told me and later did Sirius and Remus. You knew it and nevertheless you did nothing to prevent the catastrophe. Why? Why did you not give any member Veritaserum?”

Albus looked haggard and tired.

“I’m sorry, Harry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t want to believe that there was a spy, not in my Order. Furthermore there were only hints. Even Severus didn’t know anything.”

“What does it matter if they are only hints?” Harry wanted to know angrily

“Would you have believed it if anyone had told you that your friends would be it? If anyone had told you that your friends would betray you, would you have believed it?”

“No, of course not,” Harry said and the anger disappeared from his eyes.

“If you knew what the future would bring, you wouldn’t make any mistakes. I didn’t know it and you and your parent had to pay for it.”

The blue eyes looked at him pleadingly,

“Forgive me Harry and above all forgive me for believing you’re guilty for committing the murders.”

Harry’s voice turned to stone.

“Peter told you that it was him, didn’t he?”

Albus nodded.

„Well, he wasn't it. I've done it.”

Dumbledore sat up abruptly and shook his head.

“No....”

Harry laughed shallowly.

„You don't know that to think of me, do you? On which side I might be? I didn't want it. It was an accident. As he attacked us I lost control over my magic and the book-shelve collapsed over him. Peter killed Ginny's brother.“

Sitting down again, Harry sighed,

„It would be rather presumptuous from me not to forgive you, wouldn't it? I've made enough mistakes after all and....“

Harry broke up and stared at Albus,

“Did Mr. Fale have family?”

“Yes, his wife and two children.”

Lowering his gaze to the table, Harry swallowed. To take up his past would be more difficult as he had thought.

For a while they were silent. Then Albus leaned backwards and nodded,

„All right then, Harry. I'll maintain silence. Even if I disagree and think that Voldemort and the parents of your friends have deserved their executions.

But you will return to Hogwarts, won't you?”

“Yes.”

“Then you should know that you are famous, at least as Harry Black. So don’t be surprised when you return. The interest you’ll wake will be much greater than last time.”

“But don’t they know...”

“Everything what happened in the archives of the Order is only known to the Inner Circle and the Weasley Family. We covered it up so that a few members of the Order which went to Arreton Castle as well and were a bit more gossipy than others knew you only as Harry Black. The newspapers heard from it and although everything was rather confusing and no one actually knew further details, all the presumptions grew out into wild speculations.”

Harry nodded.

“That’s all I really needed.

Rising, he shook Albus’ hand and felt how the dislike he had felt then disappeared into thin air. He said goodbye and after he had promised he would soon return to Hogwarts, he stepped out into the corridor.

Lucius Malfoy stared shocked at his son. His son returned his gaze indifferently.

“Harry is his grandson. Furthermore you owe it to him that you aren’t sitting anymore in Askaban. It’s over, Dad. The Dark Lord and his Death Eaters don’t exist any longer.”

Lucius gazed after his son, shook unbelievably his head and sank heavily into his armchair. What Draco had just told him, couldn’t be true. But his mind said him that his son had indeed spoken the truth. Lucius looked down at his hands. Now everything became clearer to him, just as the reaction of his master as Harry had rescued them out of Askaban.

But Lucius didn’t understand it. How could it have come so far? He remembered the day where he had found the children in the park and he had toyed with the thought of killing the boy with the emerald eyes. He should have really done it, he thought grimly. Then it would have

never come so far. In the future he would have to hide in his castle otherwise that wretched Order would bring him once more to Askaban. As his son had gone long ago, Lucius stood up determined. He had to speak with his master and had to persuade him that everything wasn't lost yet.

Sirius stared blankly out of the window, while it was raging inside of him. How on earth had Voldemort been able to escape from Askaban? As he had heard the news yesterday, he had literally frozen. The imagination that this bastard who had murdered Charlotte was free was unbearable for him. Sirius wanted that he suffered, suffered as much as he did.

"Sirius, now sit down finally. Otherwise your tee will get cold," Remus said and put the newspaper down he had just read.

Sirius sank into his chair and reached for his cup of tea.

"What do they write?"

"They still did not find any trace of him, neither of Bellatrix LeStrange and the Malfoys." Remus replied and frowned. He was worried. Should Voldemort succeeded in seizing power a second time, war would again break out. Remus shuddered as he imagined this.

"Harry and the others must have helped them."

Remus looked up. This thought had already crossed his mind as well but he hadn't said it yet. While taking a sip of his tea, he studied his friend. In the last months he had worried greatly about Sirius. Desperate and nearly insane with grief Sirius had tried everything to find as many former followers of the Dark Lord and bring them to Askaban as possible. He had hardly returned to Hogwarts and Emily had been at a loss as what to do so that she had taken Jamie to them in the end.

"I have to find them," Sirius said and a feverish glow appeared in his eyes as he put down his cup with rattling sound and stood up.

„Sirius, you don't even know if Harry had something to do with it!" Remus exclaimed and jumped up. Somehow he had to talk Sirius out of this mad idea. Who knows what his friend would do. Before he could however do something, there was a timid knock at the door. The second time was more firmly.

"Come in, "Sirius called.

The door opened and Remus closed his eyes for a moment. It was Harry. Nearly at the same instant Sirius stood in front of his godson and demanded to know,

"Where is Voldemort? Where did you bring him?"

Harry did a step backwards and his face became hard and cold.

"That no one needs to know. I've come..."

"That no one needs to know? Did you lose your mind? He is answerable for the murders of thousands of people! Does this even matter to you? He has killed your parents! And Charlotte! Does this mean nothing to you!"

The emerald eyes flickered.

"It does mean a lot to me. And I'm sorry Sirius, that Charlotte..."

Harry broke up and after a moment he continued:

"But Voldemort has paid for his deeds and..."

"Paid? Don't make me laugh. He must back to Akaban and you will say me now where he is!"

As Harry didn't answer Sirius stepped nearer.

"Say it finally! Is he in Terley? It's after all your fault that this happened!"

"My fault?"

"Yes, if you hadn't sneaked into the archives and escaped all this wouldn't have happened!" Sirius screamed.

"If you had become the Secret-Keeper of my parents all this would not have happened either!" Harry hurled back.

Sirius turned as white as a sheet. For one moment time seemed to be standing still. Then Sirius walked with unsteady steps past Harry and through the door he silently opened.

"Sirius," Harry said and wanted to follow him.

"No, Harry, let him be. He will calm down again." Remus stopped him and led him to one of the armchairs. Handing him a cup of tea, which he had quickly conjure up, he sat across of Harry. Harry sipped at his tea and shook his head..

"I didn't want to say this. I just wanted to say him how sorry I am. And now everything went wrong."

"It wasn't your fault, Harry, you couldn't have prevented it. As far as Sirius is concerned, let him time, Harry. He loved Charlotte more than anything else in the world."

"I know," Harry said nearly inaudible.

For a while they sat in silence. Then Remus leaned forwards.

"Why Harry? Why did you free Voldemort? Do you want to be responsible for a second war? He has murdered so many people. He must..."

Harry' head jerked up.

"And the Order did kill no one? Who then killed Caro's father? She found the files. It could have been Sirius. And you did as well murder people, didn't you? Furthermore...."

Suddenly the emerald eyes looked at him with such intensity that Remus averted his gaze. As Harry told him shortly afterwards what had taken place in Albus' office and yesterday in Askaban, there

Remus didn't want to believe it and without a warning he realized that Harry saw Voldemort in a complete different light than he did and that he knew as well other characteristics of the once so powerful wizard. Remus shook his head. How complicated everything was.

But Harry was right. It couldn't be denied that their side as well had murdered and had despite everything become guilty, too.

Although he still was very much sceptical if Voldemort wouldn't again try to seize power, he knew that it would be pointless to try to persuade Harry.

"There won't be a second war, Remus. I'll promise it," Harry said seriously and Remus wanted to believe it, but wasn't really able to do so. Setting a lighter tone, he finally said,

"So you will be returning to Hogwarts?"

A few days after Harry had fetched his grandfather out of prison, they stood on the little graveyard and for the first time Harry saw the graves of his parents and while his grandfather was mourning for his long lost love not very far away, Harry wondered if his mother had known who her real parents had been. He had found out that Cathy hadn't survived Lily's birth and he assumed that Cathy's family had brought his mother then to the Evans, who had brought her up. But those questions would surely remain unanswered forever.

Harry looked over to his grandfather. He had said to Dumbledore and Remus that the Dark Lord had paid for his deeds and it was true, Harry thought. Yesterday he had given his grandfather the photo he had found in the Chamber of Secrets. His grandfather had looked at him, but without seeing him, it had been as if he had been somewhere very far away

'Do you know how it feels knowing that you've murdered your own daughter? That you didn't try any attempt to help the woman you love?'

Then his grandfather had walked down to the beach and it had taken very long until he had returned.

Harry touched the black shimmering stone of his necklace and pulled his cloak tighter around him while seeing that it had begun snowing.

He asked himself what would have happened if Cathy's father hadn't taken his daughter home. Would the war have never happened and would he have grown up with his parents and his grandparents then? Harry didn't know it but for one moment he gave himself over to his dreams.

Chapter 33

Late summer 1996

Harry sipped at his butterbeer and felt how the high spirits of the celebrating people gradually infected him. But his thoughtful mood didn't want to leave him. He looked over to Caro who had put her arms around Charlie and was whispering something to him. Her face shone with a softness he had rarely seen on her.

He smiled as he remembered how happy she had looked as she had told him the previous weekend that she had got engaged to Charlie Weasley and that they wanted to marry next year as soon as she would be finished with her last school year. Charlie's parents hadn't been very delighted about the news but all their attempts to persuade them to think it still over had been useless. Charlie and Caro had got their way and their engagement party promised to become a great success. Even Mrs. Weasley seemed to have resigned herself to it.

Harry riveted his gaze on the ocean and felt how the sight of the foaming waves was capturing him again. As they had returned to Hogwarts with their real names the truth about their identity had been found out quickly. They had warded off the curious questions; as well the hostility which had went out to them as they had reacted dismissively and coldly. It had been good that only a few had known the truth of what had happened in Arreton Castle and above all that he was Voldemort's grandson, Harry thought. So Harry, Caro and Draco had kept to themselves until he had met Ginny in the library.

They had stared at each other and Harry had seen that she still was wearing his bracelet and his ring and something had brought him to grasp her hand, to lead her up to one of the towers of the castle and to tell her everything. Since then he had often sneaked away from the common room of the Slytherins and had met with Ginny and one day Caro had had to begin to meet with Charlie in secret as well, Harry thought smiling and looked again over to his friend. Laughing Caro was whirling around in circles with Charlie. Glad about her happiness, his gaze wandered further to Draco who was talking to Hermione to his surprise and Harry wondered once again if he was right with his assumption that Draco had fallen in love with Hermione.

Well, time would it surely show. Noticing the look which Caro, who was also gazing in the direction of Draco and Hermione now, cast at the two, Harry sighed. Caro and Hermione would definitely never become close friends, too much hate stood between them but at least they had come to a truce for the time being.

Harry sauntered to one of the little tables which stood scattered around in the garden and put his glass down he had drunk out in the meantime. Turning around again his eyes fell on Sirius who was watching Jamie. The little boy whirled Lizzie so fiercely around on the dance floor that all other couples had to avoid them. Suddenly as if his godfather had felt that he was watched, turned his head and met Harry's gaze. One moment they looked at each other. Then Sirius lifted his glass to a salutation and smiled at him. Since their quarrel they hadn't spoken to each other anymore, Harry's attempts to apologize had failed. As Harry surprised returned Sirius's smile, he drew new hope that Sirius would forgive him one day. Sirius turned to Remus and Emily and Harry dwelled on his thoughts.

Perhaps everything had been predestined exactly like this and he wouldn't have been able to change all of their destiny, even if he had made other decisions.

But if he would have never left Arreton Castle then war would surely still rage. This thought comforted him and for the first time he awaited his future not anxious and scared but expectantly and joyful. Who knew what his future would still have in store for him.

While he didn't know yet what he wanted to do after school, Caro had decided and wanted to become a healer after she had spent a few hours with Poppy Pomfrey, completely out of character for her.

Harry shook his head. Her choice of career seemed to not fit Caro at all. Her mother had been shocked but Caro didn't speak with Bella anymore anyway. The news that her daughter had engaged herself with Charlie Weasley had separated the two once and for all. His former teacher seemed to blame him for this since her eyebrows twitched disastrously every time they met.

But Harry couldn't care less about this. Draco wanted to go into Politics and had decided to become the Minister of Magic one day.

Harry grinned as he imagined this. Well, Draco would surely manage it, Harry thought. Looking around he smiled happily as he finally spotted Ginny. He nodded towards Albus Dumbledore as he went past him and reaching the red-haired girl who had always believed in him, he asked her for a dance and stopped to think about the past and his future; only the present time was now important.

The old headmaster gazed after Harry and his eyes sparkled. He was happy that everything had turned out right in the end. Now, two years after the war had ended, life had returned back to normal. The ministry of Magic had been built up again and the Minister was busy with governing the country full of enthusiasm. Only the fact that Voldemort and his closest followers were still at large disturbed the peace. Albus' eyes wandered involuntarily to the castle and he sighed while asking himself whether his decision to trust Harry wouldn't lead to a catastrophe one day.

Far up at one of the windows, unnoticed by all guests, a shadowy figure was standing and was watching the sociable goings-on. His red, snakelike eyes wandered around and fell on Dumbledore who seemed to be regarding the castle. If Dumbledore suspected that he was here? If they all knew that I am standing here and watching them they wouldn't be celebrate so cheerful anymore, he thought. In the last months as his strengths had slowly returned back to him, he had often enough toyed with the idea and as Lucius and Bella had suggested it, to try again to gain his power again.

He also wouldn't have minded it, if there hadn't been Harry. If Harry had known which thoughts kept him busy, he would be shocked and knowing that his grandson would try everything to prevent his plans, he knew as well that he would lose Harry, should he indeed try to free his captured followers out of Askaban and to rule the world again with Lucius and Bella. But what was more important to him? His eyes riveted on Harry and Ginny who were dancing, snuggled close to each other, to the lovely music and it seemed to him as he would see himself together with his Cathy.

Suddenly a hardly noticeable beaming smile passed over Tom Riddle's pale face and while deep peace filled him, Alison bent down to Severus who, apart from the guests, was sitting apathetically and

tightly packed in a warm blanket in an armchair and gave him a kiss. Even if Harry had said to her then that no charm would help him, she knew that she would never give up hope. Sadly she stroked him over his black hair in which so many grey strains were mixed and wanted already turn away, as a hand closed around her wrist. Severus' black eyes looked at her:

"Alison," he said.

A/N: Hardly to believe but the story is finally finished! It was great fun writing it, at least if I wasn't shortly before throwing it away.

Many thanks to all those who reviewed! Opinions, reviews and whatever else would be of course still very great!